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CALCUTTA
THE PROFILE OF A CITY

Calcutta

The Profile of a City

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CALCUTTA

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PREFACE

The present volume is neither an exhaustive book of history nor a mere directory or traveller's guide-book. It endeavours to give in outline the story of the city from its origin dating back to the days before Job Charnock's landing at Sutanuti Ghat, tracing it through varied phases till it became what it is today, the largest metropolitan complex in India. The story analyses the features which combined to lend to the city a distinctive character of its own, marking it out from most other cities in the country. It attempts to shed more light on the origin, antiquity and growth of the city in its early years and to fill in the lacunae by telling more about the life and people in the Indian town of the Settlement than has been done in any single volume. In unfolding the story of the last three centuries, the author has relied not only on the European records—factory papers, correspondences, journals, memoirs etc.—which are plentiful and easily available, but also on contemporary source-material—archaeological and literary—derived from Indian sources, largely neglected so far, even though available.

The aim of the author has been to present, in a readable manner, the background and story of a city which may rightly claim to be a unique one, a city bewildering but fascinating, a city of many faces which is likely to detract some but is sure to attract many. The book is intended to serve as an introduction to deeper studies on Calcutta in its various aspects—pre-colonial, colonial, urban and metropolitan.

Nisith R. Ray

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TO
AMIT AND ABHIK

The Prologue

Traditionally we are accustomed to think of Calcutta and Job Charnock together. The city-scape of Calcutta is today predominantly colonial par excellence with nothing extant to boast of relics older than Charnock. And Charnock is not that distant name. It is not even three-centuries that this 'block of rough-hewn British man-hood' laid his anchor for the third and last time at the 'Sutanutee Ghat' on the eastern bank of the Hughli on the mid-day of the 24th August 1690. For his countrymen, at any rate, this was a memorable event, marking the commencement of the 'Settlement' which grew to be the capital of one of the biggest empires in recent times. Calcutta is thus a comparatively new city. It possesses no halo of antiquity such as Agra, Delhi, Allahabad or Varanasi in the north or Tanjore and Conjeeveram in the south, to name only few, can claim.

True enough, Charnock laid the foundation of British Calcutta in the early days of the East India Company's mercantile adventures in eastern India. Calcutta, as we see and know it today, is a British-made city unlike any other city (leaving out some hill-stations and cantonments) in India.

But while one should give Charnock his due, one cannot remain oblivious of the fact that it is possible to ante-date the origin and existence of the site on which the city was built. While Charnock's halt at Sutanuti was the undreamt of beginning of the future British headquarters on the Indian mainland, the site over which it arose was, obviously enough, much older. It is common knowledge that where written history fails, archaeology often succeeds. On a rough estimate the former contains "a very patchy and incomplete record of what mankind has accomplished in parts of the world during the last 5000 years. The period surveyed is at best about one-hundreth

part of the time during which men have been active over planet. Archaeology surveys a period hundred times as long”.

What then has archaeology to offer us in regard to the specific area from out of which the metropolis of the British Empire arose? Excavation, or to be more precise, bore-operations carried out in 1835-1840 in extensive areas have not unearthed the usual finds of human habitations like utensils, weapons or ruins of buildings and houses. But what they have brought to light is no less startling. Strangely enough, down below the surface at a depth of 38 feet and again a much deeper 382 feet level, were found beds of peat with wood-roots of Sundri trees, besides coarse pebbles and sands. In the opinion of the geologists, these could hardly have been deltaic accumulation. The presence of large fragments in the form of coarse gravels and sand, they say, suggests that “these could not have been brought to their present position unless the streams which now traverse the country, had greater fall formerly, or unless which is more probable, rocky hills existed which have now been partly removed by denudation and covered by alluvial deposits”.

In the context of the above, it is then no wonder that the sub-title in the opening chapter of a standard Guide to Calcutta published nearly 80 years back reads—‘Was Calcutta at one time a Hill-Station’? This might sound rather dramatic but the possibility can hardly be ruled out. Over the ages physical geography in a given area changes and sometimes changes beyond recognition. The site which proved to be the nucleus of the city of Calcutta was no exception to the law of physical variations. The finds discovered underneath the surface, referred to above, positively suggest that in the remote days of antiquity gneissic hills stood out from the sea where Calcutta later grew. At a subsequent stage, these hills were depressed and a vast tidal swamp emerged, extending as far as the foot of the Rajmahal hills.

The next phase of change was dominated by the elevation of the lower Gangetic places below the Rajmahal hills by fluvial deposits. So far as the original site around Calcutta is concerned, its ultimate formation was the outcome of an alternating process of elevation and subsidence. It is not possible to

assign the phase of physical changes to any precise or even approximate chronological framework. Any one who would suggest a date for any of these changing phases would do so at a risk.

The geological findings give us no doubt an idea of the physical configuration of lower Bengal in the days of antiquity. Few are indeed acquainted with this background. A shipman today would not perhaps give much credence if he is told that in approaching the Bay of Bengal he is sailing his ship uphill.

The geologists do not, however, help us beyond what is stated above. Nor are the archaeologists of any greater help. The only information that may be gathered about Calcutta in the long intervening years between the formation of the site on which it was destined to rise and grow and the mid-17th century is derived from legends and traditional accounts followed by works of the late medieval literature.

Turning then to legends. C. R. Wilson refers to the well-known Puranic legend tracing the origin of the 51 *pithas* or sacred spots, sanctified by the cut-off limbs from Sati's body. One of these sacred sites, and according to Wilson, the most celebrated, is Calcutta or 'rather Kalighat, the spot which received the little toe of the right foot of Sati, that is Kali.' The *Pithamala* (The Garland of Sanctuaries) of *Nigama-Kalpa* to which Wilson refers, however, claims that the actual site where Sati's toe fell was Kalikshetra (or the field of Kali) and not Kalighat, as Wilson writes. At any rate, if the version of the *Pithamala* is accepted, Kalikshetra extended over two *joyanas* from Behala in the south to Dakhineswar in the north, forming a sort of triangle, standing on the Ganges and containing the three primeval Gods of the Hindu Trinity—Brahma, Vishnu and Śiva—at its three angles, with the goddess Kali at its centre. No further information beyond the origin of Kalikshetra is provided in the legends as told in the *Pithamala*.

Let us then turn to traditional accounts as recorded in medieval literary works. The first distinct mention of Calcutta and Kalighat along with such ancient sites as Tribeni, Rishera, Konnagar and Betor on the western bank of the Hooghly and Kumarhatta, Sukchar, Kamarhati, and Chitpur on the eastern side of the river, occurs in *Manasa-Vijaya* written by Bipradas

Pipalai, about 1495-96 A.D. Scholars have, however, cast doubt on the date of composition of the several versions of manuscripts which have survived to this day. These, they say, could not have been written earlier than the mid-17th century, if not later. One thing that appears rather striking is that 'Kalighat' and 'Kalikata' are separately mentioned. This suggests that the name of the latter was not derived from the former and that Kalighat or goddess Kali did not enjoy then the reputation such as Chitpur with its presiding deity Sarvamangala commanded. Moreover, scholars also regard some portions of the *Kavya* including the account of the riparian villages on both sides of the Hooghly as spurious. Bipradas does not thus help us to arrive at a safe conclusion regarding the antiquity of the village of Kalikata.

Another well-known literary work in which a reference to Kalighat occurs is *Chandimangala* by Mukundaram Chakrabarti, composed between 1574 and 1604 A.D. It recalls, among others, the voyage of Dhanapati down the sea for worshipping the goddess Kali. It would appear from Mukundaram's description that both Kali and Kalighat had gained in importance, to judge by the increase in the number of worshippers and visitors to the site, since the days of Bipradas.

The third important literary source is the poem entitled *Kalikamangal* by Krishnaram Das. The work was composed in 1676-77 A.D. i.e. 14 years before Charnock's final landing at the ghat at Sutanuti. It describes 'Kalikata' as a 'holy and peerless' pargana located in the Sarkar of Saptagram, thus attesting to the fact of the growing importance of the site from the last decade of the 15th to the concluding quarter of the 17th century.

Even then, these sources leave a number of questions to be answered.

Firstly, were Kalighat and Kalikata two distinct units as Bipradas would have us believe? Would it be correct to say that "Kalighat itself was a mere riparian village sacred to the goddess Kali, but not important enough to merit more than a word of mention"?

Secondly, what were the sources of the growing importance of Kalikata to which Krishnaram Das refers?

Was its association with a holy place the main contributory factor to its prosperity ?

Thirdly, what was the exact site on which the original Kali temple stood ? Evidence of traditional accounts points to different sites such as Posta Bazar on the Strand Road, the eastern outskirts of the old site of Govindapur, the site on which Burrabazar and Prinsep's Ghat now stand.

These questions remain unanswered. But the sources, cited above, are corroborated in some respects by other evidences of pronounced value. For instance, the prosperity of Kalikata is attested by Abul Fazl in his *Ain-i-Akbari*. It embodies a copy of Raja Todar Mull's *Asl-i-Jumma Tumar* or rent-roll compiled in 1582. In the rent-roll, occur the names of 19 *Sarkars* in Bengal, sub-divided into 689 *mahals* or revenue divisions. One of these *Sarkars*, named as Satgaon, extending from Plassey in the north to Sagor Islands in the south is said to have contained 53 *mahals*. One of these *mahals*, 35th in number, was Kalikata which together with the 36th and 37th *mahals* paid a revenue of Rs. 23,405. This shows that Kalikata had already assumed importance enough to be elevated to the status of a fiscal unit in the 80s of the 16th century. Krishnaram's account thus stands corroborated.

The mention of Calcutta in pre-Abul Fazl period occurs in Van den Broucke's map of Bengal dated 1660 A.D. It is not a very accurate map, drawn without reference to scale. But it is significant that it mentions both 'Collecatta' and 'Calcutta' respectively standing for Kalighat and Kalikata.

What then was the picture of Calcutta in the days prior to the advent of Charnock on the scene ? The generally accepted idea that the inhabitants were then composed of primitive and aboriginal peoples like the *Jettyas*, *Duliayas*, *Nikaris* and *Bagdis*—fishermen, falconers and hunters by profession seems to be a little misleading. Evidence distinctly points to the fact that for about a century before the arrival of Charnock, in the site on which the foundations of the British power in India were destined to be laid, certain forces were at work to bring about its steady transformation. Three factors, in particular, made their influence strongly felt in promoting this change.

First, the establishment of Mughal authority in Lower

Bengal under Emperor Akbar (1556-1605) in a more effective manner than before accounted for the emergence of several fairly powerful zamindaris in areas including parts of Lower Bengal. In *Sarkar Satgaon* (in which were included Kalikata and Kalighat) at least three such zamindaris may be traced, viz., those founded by Bhabananda in Nadia, Jayananda in Bansberia and Lakshmikanta at Behala; the last-named was the ancestor of the famous Savarna-Chaudhuris who played a very important role in *Pargana Kalikata* in the days much earlier than those of Job Charnock, and indeed retained their status as powerful zamindars even long after Charnock's death.

Apart from promoting the influence of the Hindu zamindars in *Sarkar Satgaon*, the Mughal imperial authority was responsible for setting up several administrative units and military outposts in different parts of the lower regions of Bengal, including *Pargana Kalikata* and its neighbourhood. These measures acted as incentives to peace and stability and thus paved the way for the progress of a group of riparian villages towards gain in status and enabled them to attract new elements of population, distinct from those of the aboriginal and primitive folk.

The second factor which paved the way for the transformation of the villages was the growing popularity of Kali worship. At the beginning Kali was a goddess with the largest number of votaries recruited from the rank of the primitive aboriginal elements. With the growth of the Tantrik form of rituals in Eastern India, the temple of Kali became a famous centre of the new form, of at any rate, rejuvenated cult of worship. A large number of brahmans and higher caste people were added to the population thus imparting to it a new character. Pilgrims from far and near began to visit the site where the shrine stood; before long Kali superseded Chitreswari as the principal deity of worship.

The third factor was of a different character altogether. It was neither administrative nor religious. It was markedly economic. *Satgaon*, the once busy emporium, gradually began to show signs of decline following the silting of the

Saraswati on which it stood. A large number of merchants, indigenous and foreign, who profited by trade through Satgaon complex left it for Hugli. But while the general tendency was to shift the centre of mercantile activities to Hugli, there were a few notable exceptions. To this category belonged the Seths headed by Mukundaram and the Basacks led by Kalidas, Sivadas, Barpati and Basudeva. They were the earliest among the new comers on the Calcutta-site. They cleared the jungles, reclaimed portions of the waste lands and settled in Govindapur. To them also belongs the credit of inviting a fairly large number of weavers to the new sphere of their activities. Thus besides Govindapur, till then sparsely populated, where they made their new settlement, Sutanati too acquired greater importance as a centre of trade in cotton bales.

Nature too promoted influx of new population. With the shrinkage of the Saraswati and the Jamuna, the Hugli received a large volume of water, gradually widening and deepening its lower reaches. The Adi-Ganga and the creeks and canals on the eastern bank of the Hugli, connected with the Jamuna and Saraswati, gradually suffered shrinkage. These changes in the river course led to the formation of a large amount of alluvial land, opening out new avenues for residence and cultivation. There was thus a diversion of population from the riparian villages formerly served by the Jamuna and the Saraswati to the eastern bank of the Hugli, co-extensive with the growing site of Kalikata-Govindapur-Sutanuti complex. The navigability of the Hugli on the one hand, and the emergence of the alluvial lands fit for cultivation and settlement, on the other, thus combined to hasten the rise in the population in the newly emerging site. The importance of this change is not to be sought merely in the number of new arrivals but also in the pattern of composition : to the primitive dwellers who earned their livelihood as fishermen, falconers and hunters were added, as we have seen, groups connected with the functioning of the Mughal administrative machinery—specially the zamindars on the one hand and the enlarging complex of Kalikshettra on the other. To these were further added elements attracted by the prospect of better living as small traders, cultivators, middlemen and big

merchants. Within a short time the older elements, composed of primitive and aboriginal people, were submerged by the new arrivals of higher caste people, composed of bureaucratic staff, attached to the seats of government, mainly centred round the zamindars, priestly classes and worshippers of Tantric rites, deriving their power and influence from their active association with the holy site rapidly developing as a place of worship and pilgrimage, and the middle-classes attracted by the lure of better living as weavers, artisans and merchants.

Of the factors, referred to above, the economic factor seems to have been the most compelling. The prospect of trade and of better living conditions brought the largest influx of population to the newly expanding site. The new people who made it their home and sphere of activities was not necessarily confined to the rank of the Bengalees or even Indians. A sizeable number of non-Indians too were attracted to the scene. Among them were the Armenians. If the date "21st day of Nakha in the year 15 of the new era of the Julpha" which corresponds with 11 July 1630 A.D. as recorded on an old Armenian tombstone in Calcutta is correct, the Armenians were admittedly settled in Calcutta at least six decades before the arrival of Job Charnock. The Portuguese of Hugli and the Dutch of Chinsura were not strangers in Calcutta in the first half of the 17th century. While the former are known to have set up an *algodam* or a sort of cotton factory in the site, later known as Clive Street, and a Mass House near the office of the zamindars, the latter levied tolls upon boats that plied on the river near the site which later acquired the name of Bankshall.

Old family papers attest to the existence of a large number of several well-to-do families in days much earlier than those of Job Charnock. Several families, some of these of Brahmin origin, appeared to have migrated to the new site from Kumarhatta, Neemta, Tribeni and Jessore. One such family which came from Neemta was that of the Ghosals, a fact which finds mention in a literary work composed about 1676-77. Among the other contemporary Brahmin families resident in the site from out of which Calcutta later emerged as a settlement were those of the Tagores of Pathuriaghata. The other prominent residents of pre-Charnock times were the families of

the Chakrabartis founded by Bhubaneswar in Govindapur, the Ghoshes set up by Monohar Ghosh, an ancestor of Sri Hari Ghosh of Chitpur, the Mitras of Sutanuti, the Deys or Debs who later moved to Sobhabazar from Govindapur, the Mallicks of Pathuriaghata and Chorebagan, the Mitras of Kumartuli and the Dattas of Hatkhola founded by Gobinda Saran Datta—all situated within the area of Sutanuti.

It would thus be a mistake to suppose that Charnock was the first to have realised the potentialities of the site, or that the site was at the time of Charnock's landing a mere conglomeration of three obscure and straggling villages, inhabited by a few impoverished families of aboriginals. On the other hand, evidence alluded to above, makes out a different picture. The correct picture of pre-Charnock times points to a site which had already attracted to it a number of higher class of people, distinct from the primitive dwellers, who had fully comprehended the potentialities of the site on the eastern bank of the Hugli as a centre of communication in trade. Charnock was not then the first man to have seen its potentialities for development. Nor was the city 'chance-erected' as Rudyard Kipling writes. What Charnock did was to raise the site whose potentialities had been understood earlier, to the status of a settlement that grew to be the centre of the future British Empire, unthought of in the days of Charnock and for many years after.

2

Birth of the Settlement

The contemporary official records, scanty though, give no idea of the importance of Charnock's landing at Sutanuti. The entry in the *Sutanati Diary* reads as follows:

"1690 August 24th (Sunday). This day at Sankraal ordered Captain Brooke to come up with his vessel to Chuttanuttee where we arrived at noon, but found the place in a deplorable condition, nothing being left for our present accommodation and the rain following day and night. We are forced to betake ourselves to boats, which considering the season of the year, is unhealthy. Mellick Barcooder and the country people at our leaving this place (in October 1688) burning and carrying away what they could. On our arrival here the Governor of Tana sent his servant with a compliment".

A little over 200 years later an English lady*, resident in Calcutta, dramatised the scene as follows :

"A day in August in the height of the rainy season in Bengal. The muddy waters of the Hughli, beaten level by the ceaseless downpour of the rain descending in heavy unbroken rush, heaved suddenly in thick turbid swell, rising higher and even higher as the strong downward current was met and checked by the force of the rising tide, rushing in from the distant sea. In the great encircling whirlpools formed by the opposing forces the bloated carcasses of drowned animals, great branches of trees, or whole trees with a tangled mass of roots, swept round, lashed by the rain and whirling flood into semblance of some living monster, stretching octopus-like arms. Once and again would sweep by a human form, charred from

* Kathleen Blechynden, *Calcutta Past and Present*, 1905

the funeral pyre, borne on the rushing waters of the sacred stream to meet its final dissolution, devoured by the alligators, vultures, crows and jackals who haunted the river waves and shores in watchful eagerness for their prey”.

“Moving carefully and slowly upstream with the rising tide came a varied fleet of merchant vessels, and small country boats which had ridden together at the last safe anchorage, and now toilsomely accomplished another stage of their journey on the dangerous waterway. Sailing with the others came a little ‘country ship’ commanded by an English seaman, Captain Brooke and bearing a small company of Englishmen, servants of the Honourable Company of East India merchants. Their destination was the village of Chuttanuttee, where they had traded at various intervals for several years past. Steering for ‘the great tree’ which was ‘the sea mark’, the worthy captain brought his vessel to a safe anchorage in the deep water below the high rank on which the village stood”.

Even more dramatic is Rudyard Kipling’s oft-repeated account of Charnock’s mid-day halt:

“Thus the mid-day halt of Charnock—more’s the pity,
Grew a city
As the fungus sprouts chaotic from its bed
So it spread—
Chance-directed, chance-erected, laid and built
On the silt.”

True enough, in Charnock’s days Calcutta was raised out of silt—an unattractive site—a fever-haunted ‘low, deadly’ swamp, hot and humid. But Kipling has disproportionately underscored the ‘chance’ element. The selection of the site, as observed earlier, was by no means an exercise in whim or caprice. It was, on the contrary, well-calculated and deliberate. Charnock’s earlier experience of trade in Cossimbazar and Hugli was far from reassuring. Balasore too failed to impress him. But his reactions in regard to Sutanuti which he had visited twice prior to his final landing were different. Situated by the deep waters it provided safe anchorage to trading vessels. Its other advantage was derived from the fact of its location at the highest point on the eastern bank of the river which remained navigable all the year round. It also commanded easy com-

munication with the factories in Orissa, Behar and Bengal. Its huts and bazars had been steadily growing and were in a position to supply provisions for export.

Apart from the prospect of trade the site had other advantages too. Chief among these was its strategic security. Situated at a safe distance from the Delhi headquarters of the Mughals, the traders could reasonably hope to follow their pursuits without much chance of interference. With the river on the west, the expansive Salt water lakes on the east and the jungles and swamps on the remaining sides, the site had all the advantages of security against offensive actions. With Betor and Garden Reach in its immediate vicinity offering easy facilities for loading and unloading of cargo and the expanding cotton market of Sutanuti it held out a prospect which few other areas on the eastern coastline could then offer.

It is well to remember at this stage that the eastern coast had already begun to draw increasing attention following the terrible famine of Gujarat in 1630-32. Peter Mundy, the English traveller who visited the famine-stricken area, writes that at Surat the sickness was so deadly that out of 21 English traders 17 died and that a large part of the way between Surat and Burhanpur the ground was strewn so thickly with corpses that Mundy could hardly find room to pitch a small tent. This sudden catastrophe accelerated the probe to seek new fortunes in the eastern coast line. From Hariharpore (1633) to Sutanuti (1690) there was but a single chain that bound the fortunes of the British advent in India.

Charnock could hardly have had a better and more fortuitous time for his move. He had arrived in India thirty-four years before his final landing at Sutanuti. His experiences over these years had been varied and his luck extremely fluctuating. He seems to have re-learned the lesson that the English should continue to aim at 'quiet trade', avoiding conflict with the Emperor or his deputies. The memory of the Company's emissaries with 'their hands tied by a sash' appearing before the Emperor suing for peace at any price, barely six months back (February 1690) was still fresh in his mind. At the same time Charnock was not indifferent to the symptoms of decline of the mighty empire. Contemporary sources do not help us to

properly assess Charnock's personality. But even admitting the limitations of an average 17th century English trader whose love of adventure was not matched by his vision, it is to be admitted that Charnock's despatches of July 1678 are in many respects revealing. He was able to appreciate the supremely important fact that the empire then ruled by Aurangzeb (1658-1707) had grown much weaker than what it had been in the days of his father. One of these despatches read:

"..... the whole kingdom lying in a very miserable feeble condition, the great ones plundering and robbing the feebler, and no order nor method of Government amongst them. The King's *hookim* is of as small value as any ordinary Governor's".

The landing of Charnock was well-timed for another reason too, apart from the peace concluded in February 1690, thus removing the possibilities of hazardous armed conflict in the near future. In the Bengal subah, the then representative of the Empire, Ibrahim Khan was a weak old man whom the English traders called "the most famously just and good Nawab" and of whom the Muslim historian wrote "he did not allow even an ant to be oppressed". The job of Job Charnock and his successors, in all likelihood, would have been tougher if Murshid Quli Khan, for instance, happened to be in charge of the subah 13 years earlier than he did.

Leaving here Charnock to his new job, we now turn to the origin of the name after which the city is known to this day. Various explanations have been offered on the origin of the name. Literary sources do indeed refer to the place name of Kalikata, not only in respect of the city bearing the name today but also in regard to more than one place of less importance in Bengal. While the antiquity of Kalikata from which Calcutta was presumably derived may be traced and established, the origin of the name remains till now a source of controversy. We may easily dismiss popularly accepted anecdotes which recall two newly arrived Englishmen. They asked of a grazier the name of the place they had landed upon. The grazier, not acquainted with their language, thought that he was being asked about the grass, replied "Kal kata" i.e. cut yesterday. The foreigners, in like manner, took the reply for the name.

of the place which became current as Calcutta. This is too puerile to be treated seriously. The Dutch name "Golghatha" from the unhealthiness of the site as well 'Khalkatha' from the Maratha ditch (which was not dug till after 1742) may be similarly dismissed. The suggestion that the name was derived from Kalikshetra or Kalighat also does not commend itself for acceptance since in literary sources 'Kalighat' and 'Kalikata' are mentioned as separate units. It is also not difficult to reject the suggestion that the derivation of Calcutta from Kalighat or Kalikshetra, as generally accepted is philologically, and from a Hindu religious point of view, impossible. "The other suggestion which seeks to derive the name of Calcutta from 'Kilkila Nagar' or the town of joyous sound is also unsatisfactory. The description of Job Charnock as 'governor of the factory at Golgot, near Hughley', in Orme's *Historical Fragments* does not necessarily indicate that Golgot or Golghat (mentioned in Muslim chronicles) and Calcutta are identical names. As observed in "Hobson Jobson" some confusion of this name (viz. Golgot or Golghat) with that of Calcutta may have led to the curious error of the Frenchmen Luiller and Sonnerat, the former of whom calls Calcutta, Golgouthé, while the latter says : "Les Anglais prononcent et écrivent *Golgota*".

In *Riazul Salatin* (1786-87 A.D.) by Ghulam Husain it is stated that the name Kalikata was derived from Kalikarta i.e. the site where the idol of Kali was located and wherefrom the income for the worship of the Goddess and the maintenance of the shrine was derived. This is a plausible theory though a good case has been made in favour of interpreting Calcutta as a combination of the words Kali (slaked lime) and Kata (burnt shell) on the ground that there was in several parts of old Calcutta a widespread lime industry. Professor Opert sounded the warning that "the derivation of names of Indian localities from Sanskrit words, as is usually done, should be discontinued, unless where such derivations are well-supported". Calcutta indeed will hardly suffer in its importance if the origin of its name lies concealed in vernacular and non-descript sources like 'Kali and Kata'. The name Calcutta is one of the many examples of liberty taken by the English visitors converting Indian names into corrupt anglicised synonyms.

What is more relevant here is the question—If ‘Kalikata’ was one of the three villages—Kalikata, Govindapur and Sutanuti—why and how to explain that the first name eclipsed the two others and came to be applied to the complex as a whole. This question becomes all the more pertinent when considered in the context of Charnock’s landing at Sutanuti and the mention of Sutanuti (or to be more precise ‘Chuttanutee’) in the earliest official records as the seat of the ‘Bengal Council’ and the English factory. The answer is probably to be found in calculations which traders alone were capable of making. The goods of Calicut (including famous cotton cloth of fine texture known as *Calico*) in which the Portuguese traded were in large demand in European markets. The Armenians were the first to have labelled Calcutta exports as Calicut products in the hope of obtaining a ready market for them. The English traders imitated the trick and preferred the name Calcutta to that of Sutanuti or Govindapur. Thus the entire village complex came to receive the common name of Calcutta. In 1616 Edward Terry wrote:

“Of that wool they make divers sorts of *Callico* which had that name (as I suppose) from Callicuts not far from Goa, where that kind of cloth was further brought by the Portuguese.”

3

The Early Years

Charnock died within two and half years of his landing, a little over the average span of 'two monsoons' for a freshly arrived Westerner in the settlement. The picture of the settlement was palpably distressing. A despatch written on the fourth day after the landing of the "Right Worshipful Agent" reads:

"In consideration that all the former buildings here are destroyed, it is resolved that such places be built as necessity requires and as cheap as possible those to be done with mud walls and thatched till we get ground where on to build a factory."

It was not surprising that "with the rain falling day and night the factors were forced to betake themselves to boats, which considering the year is very unhealthy". The only houses which were caused to be built and in one or two instances repaired were a warehouse, a cookroom, a dining room, the Secretary's office and houses for the Agent and his two councillors—Francis Ellis and Jeremiah Peachie. The situation remained unchanged in the next twelve months. A letter dated 21 August 1691 tells us that the traders "lived in a wild and unsettled condition at Chuttanuttee, neither fortified houses, nor godowns, only tents, huts and boats".

The picture was depressing enough; it was further aggravated by the prevailing insanitary conditions. Captain Alexander Hamilton to whom we owe the earliest account of the settlement written by an Englishman, speaks of the insanitary condition of the site infested with low marshy lands, with bad odour of fish left dry by receding salt water in the winter months, the air thickened with stinging vapours and high rates of mortality. Even then in the midst of this unsavoury atmosphere, there

emerges the figure of "Mr. Job Charnock" as Hamilton spelt the name, highly interesting, seated under a shady tree, smoking a *hooka* in the genuine 'Qui Hye' fashion and negotiating business. While to Charnock the British owed the foundation of their future empire, undreamt of by the founder of the settlement, Calcutta owes to him its earliest surviving historic relic—the mausoleum—a posthumous structure, "a quaint massive piece of masonry", raised in his memory by his son-in-law, Charles Eyre in 1697-98.

For nearly half a century after Charnock's third and final landing, the story of Calcutta is known only in outlines. These are supplied exclusively from British sources. They consist of factory records, despatches, correspondences, besides memoirs and journals. These sources are no doubt important. But they are partial being confined to the account of the settlement itself. They throw little or no light on the larger area of Sutanuti—its people, their life and living. Similar is the fate of Govindapur. The Indian town, later known to the British and the fair-skinned Europeans, as the Black Town is not dealt with in the earlier European records. The polarisation of the growing city became increasingly marked with the lapse of years.

Charnock was a typical 17th century English trader, combining the traits of adventurism with commercial greed. Recent experiences of armed conflict with the Mughals had, however, chastened him a great deal. At home the authorities of the East India Company had good reasons to feel worried at the prospect of rival trading companies in the offing, challenging its right to monopoly of trade in the east. Charnock, after 1690 thought discretion to be the better part of valour and contented himself with warehouse activities. He refrained even from thinking in terms of a factory, not to speak of a fort. Instead, he gave attention to schemes aimed at expansion of market and invited artisans and traders, both indigenous and foreign, to the settlement and its environs. We have no means of ascertaining the population of Calcutta in the last decade of the 17th century. But one is not likely to commit an error if one claims that the population had tended to increase in sizeable quantity after the foundation of the settlement had been laid, generally, and

in particular, after 1696-97 following the emergence of the Fort.

Within seven months of Charnock's death the settlement was visited by Sir John Goldsborough, "Commissary Generall and Admirall of the East India Fleet". He was the first to have laid out the lines for a fort. The decision was important for two reasons. It marked, on the one hand, a shift in the merchant's thinking; on the other hand, a shift in the centre of the Company's activities from Sutanuti to *Delhi* Kalikata where the foundations of the fort were laid. The preference for *Dihi* Kalikata was prompted partly by the fact that its grounds were comparatively higher and partly by the consideration that in its vicinity stood Bura Bazar whence provisions could be more easily procured.

Nothing came out for three years since Goldsborough's visit. In 1695-96 a local rebellion led by Sobha Singh, a zaminder in Midnapur and Rahim Khan, the leader of the Orissa Afghans gave the foreign traders the much-sought-for opportunity of building fortifications. While the Nawab's forces were unable to check the rebels, the Dutch at Chinsura whose help was sought by the Mughal faujdar of Hughli proved themselves more than a match for the rebels. The rebellion was finally suppressed by the middle of 1698. But the foreign merchants capitalised on the situation. The weak and vacillating government of the Bengal subah conceded in their favour the right of fortification (1696). Thus three forts came up—Fort Gustavus at Chinsura, Fort Orleans at Chandernagore and Fort William in Calcutta.

Within a couple of years the English took another forward step when a bribe of Rs. 16,000 to the subadar secured for the Company the Zamindary rights ((i.e. the right of revenue and tax collection) of the three villages of Kalikata, Sutanuti and Govindapur (1698). This placed the English technically on a footing of equality with the privileged Mughal subjects, won for them the position of partners in the administration and assured to them a secure foot-hold in Bengal.

It is not easy to determine precisely the extent and area of the three villages covered by the newly acquired Zamindary rights. Roughly speaking, the villages extended along the river

from Govindapur Creek, later named Surman's *Nullah* and still later as Tolly's *Nullah* in the south to Baghbazar in the north. *Sutanuti* formed the northern part of the area, extending from Baghbazar in the north to the (old) Mint in Burrabazar in the south. The middle sector known as *Kalikata* stood in the intervening land between the old Mint and the Custom House. The area to the south of it was known as *Govindapur* extending as far south as the Tolly's *Nullah*.

These were striking gains no doubt. In 1700 the Settlement was given the status of a Presidency. But the coast was yet to be fully cleared. For one thing, the rivalry between the old and the new companies posed serious obstacles under whose stress the hope of peaceful co-existence tended to recede. For another, Bengal got a new subadar, who unlike his predecessors, was endowed with a strong, assertive personality and stronger views. The new subadar, Murshid Quli Khan was prepared to welcome the foreigners so long as they remained traders; he had little patience when they made efforts to transgress the limits of trade and enter the arena of local politics or develop territorial ambition. And this was precisely what the English traders aimed at. They were bent upon not only putting the 'rights' acquired by them at different stages on a legal footing by obtaining a consolidated firman from the Emperor of Delhi but also by acquiring fresh privileges like those of acquiring new territories contiguous to their settlement and the right of minting their bullion. They thought it expedient to take on the role of humble suppliants*, threw themselves completely at the mercy of the Emperor, however shadowy a figure he was, and through promise of abject surrender to his authority and payment of liberal subsidies, both in kind and cash, at last induced the inexperienced Emperor Firrukshiyar to grant them the *Firman of 1717*.

* It would be of interest to know the contents of the Company's petition dated 4 July 1712—"The supplication of John Russell who is as the Minutest Grain of Sand and whose Forehead is the tip of his footstool who is Absolute Monarch and Prop of the Universe . . . We Englishmen have traded hitherto in Bengal, Orixia and Beharr . . . are Your Majesty's most obedient slaves".

The *Firman* not only confirmed the old rights but also conferred new ones. The merchants in Calcutta felt elated and held bonfires as a mark of rejoicing. But their rejoices proved to be immature and ill-justified, for they had counted without the subadar; Murshid was a tough nut to crack. So long as he lived he resisted with success the English claim to minting of coins and area of territorial limits to the extent desired by them. Frictions followed in which the merchants fared ill and were constrained to remain content with the subadar's interpretation of the terms of the *Firman*.

The forty years (1717-1757) that separate the grant of the *Firman* from the cannonade at Plassey saw signs of improvement so far as the settlement was concerned. Previous to this the progress had been slow and halting. At the turn of the century when the settlement secured the status of a Presidency, there were, as a later source informs us, only 2 roads, 2 lanes, 17 tanks, 8 *pucca* buildings and 8000 mud houses. In the following decade and a half were added the President's House, the first Writers' Buildings, a hospital, a barrack, a church, additional bastions to the fort, a few houses and a wharf—all located in the Tank Square area. The progress even then was comparatively slow. This slowness of the physical expansion of the settlement was the resultant of a historical fact. The Company was yet uncertain of its future and was averse to any risk of open frictions with Murshid Quli Khan. They learnt to their cost that while the Emperor and his counsellors at Delhi could be purchased, they could not afford to defy or even ignore the mandates of the Nawab. It was evident to them that while the latter would welcome gain to the treasury flowing from expanding volume of trade by foreigners, he would, on no account, permit them to acquire extra-commercial rights or do anything that might confer on them extra-commercial power or prestige. This remained the salient feature of Indo-Anglian relationship till it was disposed of through series of intrigues at the beginning and trial of strength on the field of battle in the end. From the *Firman* to Plassey runs a continuous link. The history of Calcutta is an episode in that struggle for power and, so far as the first half of the 18th century

is concerned, it was largely moulded by the varying fortunes in the history of the Company's relations with the Bengal Nawabs. Till 1756 fortune, generally speaking, was not disposed to favour the adventurers who remained content with the position of unqualified subjection. As Jean Law wrote, Alivardi "was jealous of his authority. He especially affected a great independence whenever there was question on any affair between himself and the Europeans. To speak to him of *Firmans* or of privileges obtained from the Emperor was only to anger him. He knew well how to say at the proper moment that he was both King and Wazir".

Alivardi remained till his death (April 1756) both "King and Wazir". In the circumstances the progress of the Company's power and prestige in and around their settlement was slow. Even then whatever right the Company had obtained, as suppliants, proved before long to be the thin edge to cut big slices of territory in the not too distant future.

The confrontation with Alivardi's successor, Siraj was largely inevitable being an inheritance from the days of Murshid Quli Khan. The desire to obtain the right to add new territories, to mint bullions and to enjoy unrestricted privileges of zamindary, as understood by them, and above all, the claim of extra-territorial jurisdiction in the settlement made the Britishers formulate projects of extra-commercial ambition. Preliminary success recently won by them against the French in the Carnatic sharpened their appetite for political power elsewhere. The continuous and unrelieved erosion of the prestige and power of the Delhi Empire and the prospect of domestic feuds accompanying the accession of a young, inexperienced and impulsive Nawab on the throne of Bengal also spurred on their ambition. Siraj's accession was a signal for letting loose the forces of intrigues and rivalries. At the beginning the English were neither prepared nor strong enough for defence against the Nawab's army though Governor Drake had the temerity to openly defy the authority of the Nawab which lay obviously within the *de facto* sovereignty of the latter. The Company's men in Calcutta chose to rush in where others would have feared to tread. The first round of the encounter turned out to be an expensive folly.

Cossimbazar and Calcutta fell before the Nawab's attack for which no preparations on the part of the Company could be effective. The Company offered a feeble four-day resistance which Siraj without much difficulty overcame. The newly-grown settlement with its weak fort, the church and the buildings which accommodated the Company's offices and employees all fell before the Nawab's attack. Under the victorious Nawab's order the city got a new name—*Alinagar*. The new governor was Manikram (Basu) usually known as Dewan Manikchand (June 1756).

The change of master did not last long. Within six months the Company's men and ships rallied and recovered Calcutta (January 1757). What followed is well-known history. The success won by Clive at Plassey (June 1757) was a triumph more of intrigue than of military action. Nevertheless it was the turning point marking the advent of the British Empire in India. The year 1757 marked not only the removal of a hostile Nawab from a 'subah' which was then the richest in India but also the exit from the Bengal scene of the French who were the only serious European rival of the English in India. This dual success against a recalcitrant Nawab and a potentially powerful foreign competitor held out before the English the unlimited prospect of plunder and aggression. Much of the plunder went to the making of Calcutta anew.

Before tracing the pre-Plassey period of Calcutta's history it is necessary to refer to two calamities, one natural and the other man-made, to which Calcutta lay exposed. A terrible cyclone, probably attended with earthquake, overtook the town on the night of 30 September 1737. The storm raged furiously all through the ill-fated night, causing a rise of 40 feet of water above the river-level and cast away the ships (except one), all the barks, sloops, boats, canoes etc., numbering no less than 20,000. Among its other victims were the topmost pinnacles of Gobindaram Mitter's nine-jewelled pagoda, built six years ago and the spire of St. Anne's added in 1716.

The second calamity was the threat of Maratha or *Bargi* inroads which, however, did not materialise in the end. For nine years the Marathas carried on almost annual raids in various parts of the Bengal *subah*, threatening even the capital

city of Murshidabad. The Company's authorities felt panicky and decided to plant seven batteries at different strategic points of the settlement. From a Plan dated 1742 it is seen that the settlement proper within which generally speaking, only the Christian population resided, was surrounded by a ring-fence of palisades. Neither the batteries nor the palisades were, however, considered effective measures of defence so far as the areas inhabited by the Indians were concerned. The merchants, in particular, felt worried as the tale of wanton atrocities committed by the Bargis began to reach their ears. They offered voluntary contributions towards the construction of an entrenchment. The offer was accepted and the work for a ditch on the eastern side running from Perrin's Garden in the north to Govindapur in the south was accordingly begun in great earnest. In six months three miles of entrenchment were completed. But since thereafter there was no sight of raiders in the settlement's vicinity, the panic subsided and further work stood suspended. The ditch, half-done though, won for the Calcuttans the sobriquet of Ditchers.

Apart from the Plan of 1742 another plan dated 1753 also throws light on the character and extent of the settlement in the late pre-Plassey period. This Plan was surveyed by William Wills, a Lieutenant in the Artillery Company in Bengal. It shows that the English quarter was located in the site later marked by Canning Street on the north, Hastings Street on the south, the Mission Row in the east and the Hugly on the west. Its prominent landmarks were the Great Tank, surrounded by the Fort with a cluster of houses of officials standing close by—the warehouses, St Anne's church, the Chaplain's house, the Court House, the Company's stables, the Hospital, the Powder Magazine yard, the burying ground, a few buildings on the site later occupied by the Writers' Buildings, the *Cutchery*, the Jail, the play-house and few other houses used as officials' residences and, a range of buildings "consecrated to the Calico Printers". The only Indians who had houses in the area were Omi Chand, the wealthy Sikh merchant and Ramkissen Seth, the chief broker of the Company. According to available estimate there were altogether 230 structures of brick and mortar.

The Nawab was not expected to treat the English recovery of Calcutta as final and irrevocable. He marched at the head of a large army, 45,000 strong. On reaching the northern outskirts of the town he set up his own camp in the garden house of Omi Chand, situated within the inner side of the Ditch, leaving his bodyguard of Mughal horse on the ground opposite to the Ditch. Clive took advantage of the isolated position of the Nawab's camp and launched his offensive on the night of the 5th February 1757. Thick fog and superior strategy, coupled with bold adventurism, helped the English to win. The Nawab suffered a loss of 1300 men against 27 killed and 70 wounded on the British side. Negotiations followed and within less than a week of the skirmish there was peace between the Nawab and the Company (February 9, 1757). Two days later Siraj wrote a letter to Clive saying :

"I call God and his Prophet to witness that I have made peace with you and with the English nation ; that as long as I live I will look upon your enemies as my enemies, and when you write to me that you stand in need of my assistance I will give it you".

How to explain this sudden volte face ? What led the Nawab to reconcile himself to the loss of a growing settlement and to agree to confer on the English all the rights they had been claiming for the last fifty years or so ? The explanation lies not so much in the reverses suffered on January 1 and February 5, 1757 at the hands of Clive and Watson but in the political situation in which the Nawab saw himself placed. On the one hand, there were pronounced enemies in his own camp, disgruntled army commandants, ambitious merchants and bankers and on the other, the fear of Afghan invasion led by Ahmad Shah Durrani who had already caused vast stretches in Upper India to lay prostrate at his feet. Siraj felt uncertain of his own future and considered it inexpedient to risk an open conflict with the English.

The English move, on the other hand, was well-calculated. Since 16 August 1756 when the news of the fall of Calcutta reached the settlement in Madras the one consistent policy of the Company was "to re-establish the gentlemen of Bengal in Calcutta". They clearly indicated that their policy lay in

the maxim—"Sword should go hand in hand with the pen". Accordingly Clive and his close associates entered into dialogues with the elements alienated by the Nawab. At the same time they took care to impress on the Nawab that they would welcome the prospect of a peaceful settlement. While carrying exchanges of pleasantries with the Nawab they kept their powder dry. In the end, the powder won and Calcutta was once again in the Company's occupation.

Events moved pretty quickly. Clive, assured of inaction, if not actual support by the influential members of the Nawab's court, prepared for the final act of the drama. The removal of the hostile Nawab already figured in the Company's programme since the Madras Government had decided to intervene for the recovery of Calcutta in August 1756. Intrigues got the upper hand at Plassey, miscalled a battle. Inaction of a powerful section of the Nawab's army led by Mir Jafar decided the fate of the so-called battle. "A relentless fate", as a distinguished historian writes, "dragged Sirajuddaulah into destruction".

4

Towards A Capital City

If Siraj was responsible for losses to Calcutta in 1756, he was made to atone for these, calculated on an exaggerated scale in the form of restitution money. The money was much in excess of what was needed to cover the actual losses which were not considerable except in the Indian sector of the town for which the English and not the Nawab were responsible. The draft treaty as prepared by the Company's representatives read as follows :

"That restitution be made to the Company of their factories and settlements at Calcutta, Cossimbazar, Dacca & c. which have been taken from them ; that all money and effect taken from the English Company, their factors and dependents, at several settlements and *aurangs* be restored in the same condition ; that an equivalent in money be given for such goods as are damaged, plundered or lost, which shall be left to the Nawab's justice to determine".

The Nawab in his reply to the draft treaty on the particular item wrote : "Whatever of the Company's effects are in the Nawab's possession shall be restored" and refused to provide restitution for the English losses suffered at Cossimbazar, Calcutta and other places except to restore "whatever has been seized and taken by my orders and accounted for in my sircary (Government) books". It is on record that the Nawab probably agreed to pay Rs. 300,000 for the English losses on the explicit stipulation that 40,000 gold pieces (Rs. 360,000) be paid to Indian negotiators like Ranjit Ray, Omi Chand and others. But the Company's men violated the stipulation and the entire amount of Rs. 660,000 was appropriated by the Company itself.

The rebuilding of Calcutta was not an expensive task for the extent of loss or damage in consequence of the Nawab's:

attack was small indeed. It is well to remember that the bulk of the losses suffered in the Indian town was due more to the English than to the Nawab's men. The former was, deliberately sacrificed, by setting fire to them, in the hope of gaining space to fight the enemies. There were hardly any costly building, apart from the church and a few houses adjacent to it, that needed much money to be rebuilt. The restitution money was thus utilised for not rebuilding so much as for erection of new structures. The situation was rendered advantageous to the English after they had won at Plassey within a little over 4 months of the February treaty (1757). The new Nawab, Mir Jafar, who owed his throne as much to his own treachery against an unsuspecting master as to the support of the English, concluded a treaty (June, 1757) with the Company which bound him to the following commitments, among others, viz. payment of "a crore of rupees in consideration of the losses which the English Company sustained by the plunder and capture of Calcutta . . . and the charges occasioned by the maintenance of their forces", "a sum of fifty lakhs of rupees for the effects plundered from the English inhabitants of Calcutta", "twenty lakhs of rupees for the effects plundered from the Gentoos and Musselmen and other subjects of Calcutta" and "seven lakhs of rupees for the effects plundered from the Armenian merchants of Calcutta."

The treaty also stipulated that distribution of the sums allotted to "the natives, English inhabitants, Gentoos and Musselmen", shall be left to the Admiral, Col. Clive and the rest of the Council, "to be disposed of by them to whom they think proper". The only concession granted to the Nawab was that one half of the total amount was to be paid, two-thirds of their money and one-third in jewels, plates and goods and that the other half should be discharged within 3 years at 3 equal and annual payments. By the end of July 1757, as Orme reports, the Select Committee of Fort William received in coined silver 72,71,166 rupees "packed up in 700 chests and laden in 106 boats". "Never before", it is said, "did the English nation at one time obtain such a prize in solid money".

The English gains were not confined to cash payment only. The treaty, referred to above, also contained the following 2 clauses being obligatory on the Nawab :

(a) Within the ditch, which surrounds the borders of Calcutta, are tracts of land belonging to several Zamindars, besides this I will grant the English Company 600 yards without the ditch and

(b) All the lands south of Calcutta, as far as Culpee, shall be the Zamindaree of the English Company and all the officers of those parts shall be under their jurisdiction, the revenues to be paid by them (the Company) in the same manner with other Zamindars.

Thus the losses suffered by the settlement in consequence of Siraj's attack were more than compensated for the reconstruction of the town. The two Nawabs were made to pay more than was called for in terms of actual losses incurred as a result of the action of Siraj's army. Of course a sizeable amount of the restitution money was appropriated by the local leaders of the Company and their Indian collaborators whose share of loaves and fishes was by no means negligible.

It is not surprising that the English took up the project of a new fort on a safe site, at Govindapur, on the river bank, considerably south of the old fort. Begun in October 1757 it took 16 years, an unusually long time for the Fort to be completed (1773). Captain Brohier to whom the task was assigned "talked much but did little". His successor was a mere novice. Seven others who followed in turn, worked at the project till it was completed in 1773. Apart from lack of competent leadership and proper initiative, there was a serious problem, viz. a dearth of labourers. Repeated official announcements forbidding the employment of labour by private persons produced no effect. Even Government orders to seize all the brick-layers in Calcutta proved equally infructuous. A ban on the construction of new houses by private individuals also produced no results whatsoever. The engineers also complained of non-availability of materials. The fort was a symbol of the Company's military authority in the eastern provinces which had proved to be superior to that of the Nawab and held out the prospect of consolidation of British power in India. And

yet the strange fact remains that no guns except on ceremonial occasions were ever discharged from ramparts since the day it was completed till date to meet any enemy attack. Today it remains the headquarters of the Eastern wing of the Indian armed forces and of the Bengal army unit.

The choice of the new site for the Fort led to displacement of a large number of dwelling houses in its vicinity. The Indian settlers in this area, the earliest among them being the Seths and the Basacks, on being compelled to leave it, transferred themselves to new sites in the northern parts of the town—Ahiritola, Pathuriaghata, Jorasanko, Hatkhola and Sobhabazar. Among the exceptions the most notable was Kandarpa Ghoshal who moved to Kidderpore and founded there the well-known Bhukailas estate. Thus while the Indian town gained alike in population and opulence, the white or the official town received extended boundaries towards Chowringhee, Dhurromatolla and Bow-bazar areas where new buildings, used as residences of the Company's officials and merchants, raised their heads. The *maidan* was divested of its jungles and low-land. Splendid garden houses in the suburbs were yet another innovation. Within 30 years of Plassey, massive buildings like those of the Sadar Diwani Adalat, the Khalsa, the Committee of Revenue, the Supreme Court, the Writers' Buildings and St. John's Cathedral Church proclaimed the beginning of the Company's suzerain power with its centre in Calcutta's settlement. Among the post-Plassey buildings a few survive. Two of these deserve to be specially mentioned. The one is Beth Tephillah (House of Prayer), better known as the Mission Church completed in 1770 at the initiative of John Zachary Kiernander (1711-1799), the first Protestant missionary in Bengal. The other is the stately mansion known as the Belvedere. It had a chequered career starting as the country-seat of the Governor of Fort William in 1769-70. It was leased out to Major Tolly in 1775. After his death it passed through temporary ownership and occupation of Sir Edward Palet, Commander-in-chief and Charles Prinsep, Advocate-General of Bengal. In 1854 it was sold to the East India Company who chose it as the official residence of the Lt. Governor of Bengal. Today it houses the National Library of India.

A third survival, though not in full form, is the house in Alipore named after Warren Hastings. The house, described by Mrs. Fay as 'a perfect bijouh' remained the Governor-General's personal property till 1785 when it was disposed of through sale. Macrabie who visited the house in the days of Hastings described it as "a pretty toy but very small tho' airy and lofty". Improved, enlarged and renovated the house now serves as an Institute for women's education.

A greater sense of security and of prospect of gainful investment and occupation in the steadily growing town gave an incentive to non-official house-building activities on an increasingly large scale. As Mrs. Jemima Kindersley who was in India between 1765 and 1768 wrote :

"People keep constantly building and every one who can procure a piece of ground to build a house upon, consults his own taste and convenience without any regard to the beauty and regularity of the town".

Even then there was no systematic planning behind these building operations ; the growth was haphazard and "so irregular", wrote Mrs. Kindersley that "it looks as if all the houses had been thrown up in the air, and fallen down again by accident as they now stand".

The hectic growth in the number of houses and the craze for land indicate appreciable rise both in extent and population. An idea of the extent of Calcutta about 1779 may be formed from a judgment delivered by Justice John Hyde of the Supreme Court :

"Kidderpore is a village about 2 miles from the Court House, lying close to a small river commonly called by the English, Kidderpore Nulla. This river is the boundary southward of the town of Calcutta, of which the river commonly called the Hooghly River, is the boundary north-westward, and the Mahratta Ditch, which exists in many parts and the line where it once was, in other places, are the boundaries north-eastward, eastward and south-eastward, to the place where that ditch of line where it existed, meets the Kidderpore Nulla, and prove that place, the rivulet is the boundary. This rivulet was a little to the westward of the new Fort, which is considered as within the town of Calcutta, and I consider Fort William to be the

English name of the town. Calcutta is the Bengali name of one of many villages, of which the town of Calcutta consists”.

There is no reliable evidence on the population of Calcutta. Holwell's estimate for 1752 is a doubtful one; reliable statistics are not available till the first quarter of the next century. We are told therein that there were 179,917 people living in Calcutta of whom 118,203 were Hindus, 48,162 Muslims, 13,138 Christians and 414 Chinese. But so far as the second half of the 18th century, notwithstanding non-availability of reliable statistics of population, two main issues emerge—firstly, that since the recovery of Calcutta by the Company in January 1757 there had been a steady increase in the population and secondly, the presence of diverse people like the Europeans, Armenians, Eurasians, Chinese, Abyssinians, Iranians, living side by side with the Indians, imparted to the town a composite or even a cosmopolitan character.

Another feature of striking importance in the early physical growth of Calcutta is the tendency of polarisation of the town in terms of racial elements in its population as well as occupational contiguity—the White or predominantly English town around the expanding Tank Square and Chowringhee areas, the Native or Black Town confined mainly to the northern sector of the town and in between them what may be called the Brown town, stood inhabited mainly by the non-European foreigners. While a large element in these sectors drew their main income either as officials of the Company, merchants and landlords, forming the higher strain of social life, there were the rapidly growing tribes composed of artisans, labourers, weavers, small tradesmen, palankeen-bearers, boatmen and holders of new occupations like the *banians*, *Sarkars*, *gomostas*, *dobhasis* and others indispensable in mercantile and administrative establishments.

While it is possible to follow the progress of growth in the European or official sector of the town which was remarkable, it is difficult to get glimpses of the Indian town and its pattern. It is however, a permissible conjecture that the roads and houses in the Indian town, a predominantly Bengali Hindu city, were less imposing but more numerous than their counterparts in the White town. As Sir William Jones informs us, the Black Town

was over-crowded and with few exceptions "even the houses of the opulent Indians were not built to please the eye".

On the whole, Calcutta in the 80s of the 18th century, notwithstanding its unplanned growth, had acquired enough imbalance to attract the attention of visitors to the town from abroad. William Hodges, the artist-traveller (1780-83) wrote :

"As the ship approaches Calcutta the river narrows ; that which is called Garden Reach presents view of handsome buildings, on a flat, surrounded by garden : these are villas belonging to the opulent inhabitants of Calcutta". He dwelt upon the splendour of "a glaxis and esplanade, bounded by a range of beautiful and regular buildings, broad streets, magnificent buildings and superb appearance of houses". Thomas Daniell, another well-known explorer and artist, who arrived within 3 years of the departure of Hodges also spoke of the "superb edifice known as the Government House and the Council House". To quote him, "The houses at Calcutta are without chimneys and have universally terraced roofs ; those on the Esplanade are insulated from each other, and approached by a flight of steps under a projecting portico : each is surrounded by a magnificent colonnade and has the air of a palace. The streets are spacious, and from the diversity of European and Oriental manners present a scene of inexhaustible variety and amusement. The chariot often comes in contact with the palankeen, and the phaeton is seen lightly rolling before the litter-like hackney, a covered cart slowly drawn by bullocks and appropriated to the service of secluded females The river presents a scene of almost equal animation and variety".

But neither Hodges nor Daniell records any impression of the Native Town different from the one given by Sir William Jones. Thus by the end of the 18th century, the rate of improvement of the town was considered phenomenal enough to justify the raising of its status to that of "the seat of the British Indian Government". The end of the century coincided with the arrival of Wellesley under whom Calcutta became the official headquarters of the British Empire of India.

5

The Social Milieu

Social life in Calcutta of the 18th century reflects the two-fold process of transformation of a group of straggling riverine villages into a busy mercantile unit on one side, and on the other, the conflict and adjustment of two distinctly opposed culture-patterns. The social history of Calcutta thus presents an interesting study. Accounts of the life of Europeans in Calcutta in its early days and of their social habits are prolific and widely known. Life in the Indian town and of the early Indian families is comparatively less known. This is mainly because Indian sources have not been taken care of to the extent that memoirs and travel accounts of the Europeans have been relied upon and utilised. In the pages following we discard the story of the Europeans in early Calcutta, which has been overdone and is within easy reach. We prefer instead to concentrate on the early settlers in the Indian part of the town.

A few words need be written of the main features of social life in Calcutta of the 18th century as a sort of background to the rise of fortune-hunters assembled to shake the pagoda tree in the growing township. The social history of Calcutta largely presents an interesting study of action, interaction and synthesis of two distinct cultural patterns—the older Hindu-Muslim and the newer or Western—woven into one. The materials left by the westerners in the form of memoirs, journals, diaries etc., besides official despatches easily exceed in bulk, as said earlier, their counterpart in Bengali or as a matter of fact in any Indian language in which written works were available only in manuscripts till the last quarter of the 18th century.

Bengal, and in fact, Eastern India was a distinct social unit, marked by peculiarities of its own. Since remote past Bengal is known to have retained some primitive and pre-

Aryan norms and practices which the process did not succeed in eliminating altogether. Muslim rule whether in the days of Turco-Afghans or under the Mughals was never effective or total. It was only in the time of Akbar that the Mughal authority in Bengal may be said to have gained some ground. Life in the remote villages, however, remained unaffected by political convulsions and followed the old and traditional Hindu or Indian norms of life. Higher up in the level of courts and administration the power and posts were held by the aristocracy, partly Muslim, partly Hindu. The former were mainly foreign elements composed of fortune-hunters and adventurers par excellence from Isphahan and other Asiatic Muslim countries. They came and went back without ever evincing any interest in the affairs of the governed. The Hindu aristocrats retained power since the Nawabs valued their knowledge and experience in the working of the administrative machinery in general, and in revenue and finance, in particular. The upper Hindu aristocratic section formed a class by itself learning the Persian language, observing Muslim etiquettes and court practices, even imitating Persian dresses. But the bulk of the people, living in the villages, as observed earlier, were not affected. They continued to follow the same ways of living and thinking as their forbears had done. But the stream of old culture had already begun to show signs of decay. There was "much wood that was dead and diseased". Lack of patronage at the state level and of leadership at the grass root was mainly responsible for it. Much of what swayed their thought was rigidly sectarian and it verged on superstition. Even then these had their moorings in the past. Basically they remained rooted to the past in the sense they were made to understand it.

Not so stagnant was life in the towns. So far as the early days in Calcutta were concerned, dating back to pre-Charnock epoch, as indicated earlier, in addition to the primitive folks like the *Pods*, *Nikaris*, *Bagdis*, *Shikaris*, *Jeliahs* and *Duliahs*, there were in the rising township elements of higher caste people like the officials of the Mughal Government, the priestly classes who thronged and thrived round the temple of Goddess Kali and Deity Shiva and the opulent mercantile classes who derived their power and influence through trade like the Seths,

Basacks and others. Thus in the days before Charnock's advent, society in Calcutta was composed of heterogeneous elements.

The advent of the English and the prospect of trade, as we have seen, gave an impetus to the growth of Calcutta's population. Nowhere in Eastern India were the natives more exposed to foreign ways than Calcutta. Among the new arrivals were foreign merchants like the Armenians, Europeans, Iranians, Chinese and Abyssinians, eager to exploit the potentialities of a trade mart and comparatively better security it provided than the older towns like Dacca, Hooghly and Murshidabad. The Indian families whose settlement in Calcutta goes back to days earlier than those of Charnock also saw in the township reasonable possibilities of investment in land and house property. Besides the merchants and landlords there were middle-class people—upper and lower—who were attracted to the town in the hope of earning ready money through engagement in various professions opened out in consequence of expanding trade by the English, in particular, who earned the name of collaborators. The lower group was formed by low-salaried staff—the *Chopdars*, *Santabardars*, *Abdars* and host of others. There were also new comers from neighbouring areas with limited ambition. They mainly engaged themselves as palankeen-bearers, gharry-wallahs, artisans, coolies, pedlars and smaller tradesmen like weavers, dealers in spices etc. This heterogeneity assured to Calcutta's society a pattern which could not be found in the earlier towns of Dacca and Murshidabad.

Plassey was as much a dividing line in the political history of the subah as in the history of its society and culture. The Mughal rule in Bengal always bore the character of a foreign conquest. In the opinion of an eminent historian "Life in India under the British became so very different from what it was in those days (when the Mughal ruled) that it is very difficult to form any idea of the state of things in Bengal before Plassey". But it is clear that the advent of the Europeans in Bengal, as in several other parts of India, was accompanied with a confrontation at the cultural level between two distinct and sharply opposing entities. It is also evident that ultimately an adjustment followed which permitted the absorption of many western

elements in the corpus of the composite Indian culture. The social life in 18th century Calcutta reflects the operation of the dual phenomenon of conflict and adjustment. Calcutta thus saw the beginning of this process which was destined to affect other towns in India in due course.

The most remarkable thing about the 'native' town was the predominance of its bazars. These served as media of exchange of population on the one hand, and on the other promoted the growth of clusters of new homesteads and establishments in their immediate vicinity. The first among the Indian families of importance in Calcutta were those of the Seths and Basacks. On leaving Saptagram they came over to what was destined to be Calcutta. They chose Gobindapur by divesting it of the jungles with which it was infested. They thus received the sobriquet of 'jungle-cleaning pioneers'.

According to family annals, Kalidas, the founder of the historic Basack family is said to have at first settled in the 30s of the 17th century, in the low-lying site of Gobindapur. At a later stage Kalidas's family, along with three other Basack families, headed respectively by Basudev, Barpati and Karunamoy, shifted to the site, on a higher level, subsequently known as Lall Dighee area. The other single family was that of the Seths headed by Mukundaram Shresthi who worked in close collaboration with the Basacks. The Basack-Seths were thus the earliest among the Indian migrants to what later came to be known as Calcutta. Their main income was derived from trade with the cotton weavers of Baranagar. Shortly after, they amassed enough wealth to set up a large factory whose employees were no less than 2,500 weavers. The factory was located in the area which later formed parts of the Maidan.

The Seths and Basacks were not destined to remain in their original habitation in Gobindapur for long. At the beginning of the second half of the 18th century they moved to Burrabazar following the acquisition of the Gobindapur site by the English traders for building a new fort there. Here they removed their factory and marts and carried on direct trade with the English and other foreign merchants in Eastern India. The *Consultations* and Fort William records speak of the Seths as "our most secure merchants" and state "we judge it our interest

to encourage all persons that bring in the best cloth and they (the Seths) are generally those who have most influence over the weavers, which must be men of substance and credit". The English merchants found in the Seths and Basacks their most dependable collaborators and for many years their fortunes were closely linked together.

The early English records, however, make less mention of the Basacks than that of the Seths. Their activities covered wide areas operating from various centres like Rajmahal, Murshidabad. Cossimbazar, Dacca, Hugly, Santipur, Cossijura, Saptagram and Balasore. Early English records dated 1707 testify to the reduction of rents payable by the Seths in consideration of the fact that "they being possessor of the grounds, which they made into gardens before we had possession of the Towns being the Company Merchants and Inhabitants of the place".

The name of Lal Mohan, son of Mukunda Ram occurs in the records of the E. I. Company. Beverley in his *Report on the Census of Calcutta* speaks of the later Tank Square being earlier named after him as Lall Dighee. His successors, Giridhari, Brajaram, Sundarram and Jagannath derived enormous wealth as 'Dadney' merchants. A later member of the family, Janardan (1706) acted as the Chief Banian of the English Company. The fortunes of the family made enormous progress in the days of his successors—Banarasi (1712) and Baishnabdas (1727). They acted as the Company's brokers and wielded so much power and influence that the British Agents and Governors in the early days became jealous of them. Governor Hedges (1713-1717), for instance, made repeated attempts to curb their power but in vain. He complained that Baishnabdas grew so powerful that none dared to lodge complaint against any of his stooges even though they were guilty of acts of wanton oppression. Baisnabdas derived his fortunes from ancestral trade, besides fame from his acts of piety. He was long remembered by posterity for regular despatch of holy waters of the Ganges in sealed containers to distant parts of the country. He is credited with having dug 108 tanks along the road to holy places like Puri and Benaras. He was also the owner of vast landed estates in Calcutta and its vicinity.

For some years there was an eclipse in Baisnabdas's for-

tune when the local English coteries were able to remove him from the office of the broker. But the English before long realised to their cost that they could not dispense with the Seths. They atoned by conferring the *Siropa* to which brokers were entitled to Baisnabdas's next of kin, Shyamsundar (1740). The main source of influence of the Seths was derived from caste-homogeneity which bound them in close ties with the cotton weavers. It was too strong a bond of unity to sap.

The decline in the fortunes of the Seths from the second half of the century was not the result of any slackening of caste rigidity. It was rather the outcome of the substitution of Dadney merchants' system by that of direct agency of the Company, dominated by the *gomastas* on the one hand and the widening prospect of trade following the English success at Plassey on the other. This marked the beginning of decline in the mercantile fortunes of the Seths and the Basacks. Henceforth they found it more profitable to invest wealth in land. Sobharam Basack, 11th in descent from Kalidas, for instance, whose name occurs in the list of recipients of post-Plassey restitution money, owned 37 houses in Burrabazar besides 3 gardens and 1 pond. An idea of the enormous wealth owned by him may be obtained from his inventory which includes, among others, bonds from Europeans and Armenians valued at 5,27,112 Arcot rupees and ventures to Bussora, Suez and Bombay. Like Baisnabdas, Sobharam spent lavish funds towards maintenance of temples and religious establishments.

Another example of the rise of a caste-group or community to wealth and importance in Calcutta in its early days is provided by the *Suvarna baniks* or gold-merchant families—the Mallicks (originally Deys), the Seals, the Dattas, the Dhars and the Lahas. They started as itinerant merchants till they discovered in the growing port town of Calcutta the most promising field for speculation and investment. The first among the Mallicks whose name occurs in the Company's records was Nemai Charan (born 1736) of Sinduriapatti in Burrabazar. Evidence, however, points to the fact that the opulence of the family had an earlier start. His grand-father Darpanarain is known to have endowed many charitable institutions in Benaras, Nabadwip and Hugly. Darpanarain's son, Nayan

Chand, apart from founding a number of religious establishments in Benaras, Mahesh and several other places in Bengal, was also responsible for providing Calcutta with at least one of its thoroughfares, later known as Cross Street. Nemai Charan is said to have inherited wealth estimated at 40 lakhs, which at his death rose to be over 3 crores. Much of it was derived from salt trade and from professional advice given to intending litigants even though he was lacking in formal qualification. William Hickey in his *Memoirs* (Vol. IV) speaks of Nemai Charan in these words:

“This man had acquired an extraordinary efficiency in our laws, so much so that he had for many years been the adviser of all those who had anything to do with Courts of Justice and was competent to tell them whether they had sufficient merits in their cases to justify the commencement of or the defence of a suit. He was also perfectly conversant with the distinction between an equitable and a legal title, and was in the practice of sitting every evening in his own house for a certain number of hours, to hear the statements of the various persons that attended for the purpose of consulting him, for which by the by, it was said and I have no doubt truly that he made their suitors whose causes he espoused and patronised, amply repay him for his trouble and his time by exacting a very high percentage upon whatever the amount recovered or saved might be”.

It was an irony of fate that a protracted law-suit which arose out of the ‘Sradh’ of “this shrewd and uncommonly clever fellow”, as Hickey describes him, was the beginning not only of the disruption of the family but also of its economic decline.

The story of the Mallicks (formerly known as Seals) of Chorebagan dates back to the times of Madhu Seal. The early members of his family carried on trade in Saptagram in its heydays, and following its decline came over to Hugli and Chinsura. It was in the 40s of the 18th century when there was a large exodus from regions lying to the west of the Hugly to Calcutta which held out greater prospects of security that a scion of Madhu’s family, 15th in descent from him, Jayram, removed himself to Gobindapur. Later the family shifted to

Pathuriaghata. Under one of his successors, Gangavishnu, the volume of trade in which the Mallicks were engaged, expanded to such an extent that it covered export to distant countries like Singapore and China. The Mallicks of Pathuriaghata emulated the example of their Sinduriapatti kinsmen and endowed many charitable and religious institutions in Puri and Vrindaban. Rajendra, a later member of the family, settled in Chorebagan, is remembered even today as the founder of the famous Marble Palace of Central Calcutta.

The Seals of Colootolla were yet another family whose association with Calcutta may be traced to the middle of the 18th century. Unlike the Seths, the Basacks and the Mallicks, the Seals acquired their affluence from business conducted in Calcutta with no anterior connection with Saptagram and Hugly. The most well-known among the members of the Seal family was Motilal (born 1792) who acted as the Company's *Mutsuddi*. The Roys (formerly Dhars) of Posta, another Subarna banik family, owed their wealth and influence to Lakshmi Kanta Dhar who acted as a sort of banker to Clive. The fortunes of the family reached their climax in the days of Lakshmi Kanta's grandson, Sukhamay. He acted as the Dewan of Elijah Impey and was given the title of Maharaja.

From the history of these opulent Bengali settlers in the early days of Calcutta it is evident that though they started as independent traders, they preferred, before long, to act as collaborators with the English. From the rank of collaborators they gradually sank into the position of *Mutsuddis*, *Barians* and *Dewans*. Such examples are provided by the families headed by Maharaja Naba Krishna Bahadur of Sovabazar, Ram Charan Roy of Pathuriaghata, Gocool Chund Ghosal of Bhukailas, and Ganga Gobinda Singh of Jorasanko. Their example was followed by other fortune-seekers like Cossinauth Babu of Burrabazar, Darpanarain Thakur of Pathuriaghata, Santiram Singh and Prem Chand Banerjee of Jorasanko, Doorga Churn Mitter of Sutanuti, Durga Churn Mukherjee of Baghbazar, Madan Mohan Datta of Hatkhola, Banamali Sarkar of Kumartooly, Gobinda Ram Mitter and Nanda Kumar Sen of Chitpure. Ram Sankar Halder of Ahiritola, Krishna Prosad Halder of Jaun Bazar, Rajib Lochan Mitra of Simlea. The list is by

no means exhaustive. All of them, besides many others, derived their wealth and influence in early Calcutta society from service under the Company rendered in various capacities as *Dewans*, *Banians*, *Mutsuddis*, *Deputy Zamindars* and even as *Dobashis* and so on. It need not be supposed that salaries and perquisites were the only sources of their income. They supplemented their wealth as intermediaries in trade and from investment in land which received an impetus owing to security derived from Permanent Settlement of 1793. Ram Dulal Dey, for instance, is said to have left estates and moveable property worth 1 crore and 25 lakhs of rupees. An idea of the enormous wealth they acquired is attested by the equally enormous expenditure they incurred in attending to marriage and *Sradh* ceremonies. From court documents it is known that Ganga Gobinda spent some 15 to 20 lakhs of rupees on the occasion of his mother's *Sradh*. Nabakrishna, we are informed, caused 4000 cavalry to escort the procession organised on the occasion of his son's marriage.

It would be wrong to suppose that the comprador elitist elements in Calcutta's early population were composed of Hindus, mostly Bengali. There was a sprinkling of Muslims too. The short account of the Second Class Residents of Calcutta in the year 1822 recorded by Ananda Krishna Bose, mentions Moonshee Sudderuddin, who served as Moonshee of Mr. Barwell and resided at Mutchwa Bazar. There were also Muslim royalties in exile like the hostage princes of Mysore, Wazir Ali of Oudh and Nawab Mir Jafar during the period of his forced residence. Muslim traders were also there, mostly from West and Central Asia, and by faith, Shia, concentrated in Chitpur area giving it the appearance of a Muslim town. They were generally migrants from Hugly which had become a Shia colony in the days when Murshidabad was yet to reach the height it subsequently did under Murshid Quli Khan. Many Persian physicians and perfumers are also known to have settled in Hugly. In fact the main stream of Persian migrants to India in the early 18th century was diverted to Bengal then under the rule of the Shi'aite dynasty. With the decline of Hugly many of them found new homes in Calcutta. Palatial buildings like the Buckingham House, situated in the core of

the settlement was owned by Muhammad Reza Khan, a Shi'aite migrant whose role in the history of the Bengal Subah in the post-Plassey decade is well-known. The migrants from Hugly became engaged as *Vakeels* of the Company. Others relying on their knowledge in Arabic and Persian employed themselves either in literary pursuits or as officers in the Sadar Dewani and Faujdari courts. A number of them are also known to have owned landed estates in several parts of the town—Jaun Bazar, Colinga, Matiaburuj, besides Chitpur. The justification for a Madrassa in Calcutta in 1781 would not have arisen unless there was a sizeable number of Muslims of the upper and middle classes resident in Calcutta. The majority in the Muslim community was formed by lower echelon composed of workers, domestic servants, labourers, weavers, artisans and even peasants.

The Armenians were among the other early settlers in Calcutta. Their claim that they came even before Job Charnock had made his final landing rests upon evidence which is open to reasonable doubt. What is beyond dispute is that they were settled in Chinsura as early as 1625 and that, in response of Charnock's invitation they appeared on the Calcutta scene in large numbers and benefited mostly from trade with Central Asian countries. They remained for many years the principal negotiators between the English and the Delhi Emperors, and their deputies—the Nawabs of Bengal. Speaking of the Armenians a report dated 1803 reads:

"They carry on an extensive trade from China to the eastward and to the west as far as the Persian Gulf. Their information from all these quarters is the most accurate and minute of any body of men in their profession. Many of them are possessed of large capitals. As subject they are perhaps the most peaceable and loyal to be found in any country, as members of the society, they are polite and inoffensive".

The oldest among the Armenian merchants in Calcutta was Aga Catchikk Arrakiel (1790). The first Armenian church in Calcutta, the church of St. Nazarath, was built in 1724.

The other important foreign element in Calcutta's early population were the Portuguese. By the middle of the 17th century they were almost a spent-up force in consequence of their

long-practised preference for acts of plunder and misadventures to disciplined trade. They had lost their racial identity too, due to free intermarriages. In Calcutta they had become half-castes, engaged as writers, clerks (Keranis), table-servants and topazzas. The ban imposed on them by Clive (1756) on the entry to Calcutta was shortly after withdrawn. On their return they dwelt mainly in the quarter known as Moorgyhatta, for it is said, they were the only people in Calcutta of those days who kept fowls. Holwell describes them as "the black mustee Portuguese Christians residing in the settlement as Feringhees".

Among other early foreign settlers in Calcutta were the Greeks. Like other Europeans they too came to seek fortunes in trade. The earliest among the Greek settlers, Hadjee Alexias Argyre, a native of Philippopolis, is said to have come to Bengal in 1750. Another notable Greek who later became a great Indologist was Demetrios Galanos (1760-1833). His stay in Calcutta was much briefer compared with residence in Benaras where he kept himself engaged till his death in the study and rendering into Greek Hindu sashtras including the Bhagavat Gita.

Among the non-Bengali Hindus, resident in early Calcutta were the North Indian Khattris, Agarwal and Marwari Oswals. Dewan Gopinath of Burrabazar, mentioned earlier, was a Khatri whose wealth at death (1792) was valued at 66 lakhs. The famous Banking House of the Jagat Setts whose connections with the Nawabs and then with the English merchants were of a close nature had their headquarters at first in Murshidabad and then in Monghyr. They contented themselves with only one *Kothi* or office in Calcutta. The most well-known among the Agarwals settled in Calcutta was Monohardas of the firm Monohardas Dwarkadas which eclipsed the earlier banking house of the Jagat Setts. Their strength lay not in number but in concentration of wealth in the possession of the few Marwari settlers in Calcutta. It was not till the next century that migrants from Marwar began to seek fortunes in the growing city and port of Calcutta.

There were also a few Maratha families in Calcutta and other parts of Bengal who came in the wake of the Maratha

raids of the mid-eighteenth century. The Gujrati merchants also set up trade in the growing port-town. The first Parsi merchant in the town was Dadabhai Berhamji Bantji who is known to have arrived in 1767. His relative, Rustomji Cowasji Banaji won distinction as one of the richest merchants in Calcutta in the early years of the 19th century. Among the Panjabis the much-maligned but the most resourceful was Omi Chand who began his career as an apprentice under the Seths. He grew to be a millionaire as a banker. He lived in great luxury and owned the famous garden-house of Hateebagan. He was one of the few Indians to have owned a house and landed estates in Tank Square area. The other great Sikh merchant was Huzuri Mul. He was a relation of Omi Chand and served as an agent of Jagat Sett. He owned vast landed estates in Kali-ghat and Bow Bazar areas.

It is not possible to ascertain exactly the percentage of the different communities in the early years—the Bengalis, the Hindus, the Muslims, the Europeans, the non-Indian Asiatics and non-Bengali Indians. But it is a permissible conjecture that the Bengali Hindus easily formed the substantial majority. It is also evident that the bulk of the Bengali population hailed from the areas now comprised in West Bengal and the districts of Khulna and Jessore now in Bangladesh. The number of migrant families from Eastern Bengal was smaller at the beginning. The self-sufficiency of life in East Bengal derived from its natural resources and the opportunity of living in comparative isolation and security afforded by inaccessible *hawars* and creeks was perhaps the major factor in making the families in the eastern districts less inclined to leave their original homeland.

The advent of the Europeans and, in particular, of the English made its influence felt in the 18th century social life of Calcutta. Though the settlement was polarised into at least two distinct sections—the White and the Black Towns—the native and the foreign elements could not remain in a state of complete isolation from each other. Common interest in trade tended to bring them nearer. The aspirant Indians found in contact with the English a sure means of amassing wealth, first as collaborators and then as dependents. The English, gene-

rally speaking, preferred to live in isolation, keeping company with others belonging to the same community of white people. As Price wrote in his *Observations* :

"In peaceable times, the European inhabitants of the English, French and Dutch settlements mingle together like one great partriarchal family of old. Their plays, their masquerades, their Freeman's clubs, their public balls on the birth days of their several sovereigns are open to the three settlements". Even then the English soon found it expedient to come out of their isolation and mix with the rich Indian communities. The neo-wealthy Indian section deriving social importance from ready-earned riches were worshippers of the Goddess of Wealth in preference to the presiding deity of learning. The so-called *Babus* of Calcutta vied with one another in making a show of their riches through celebration of social rituals like marriages, *Sradhs*, performances like *nautches* and other festivities in which the European residents used to participate. With the growth in the volume of trade and lesser dependence on the Indians, the British developed a sense of exclusiveness and even of arrogance which was certainly less marked in the 18th than in the following century.

It is not necessary to give any details about the social life of the Shahibs in Calcutta in the late 18th century. It is enough to refer to a typical case of a 'Bengal Nawab' described by William Mackintosh in his *Travels* :

"About the hour of seven in the morning, his durwan opens the gate and the varandah is free to his circars, peons, hurcarras, chubdars, houcca-bardars and consumahs, writers and solicitors. The head bearer and Jemmadar enter the hall and his bedroom at 8 o'clock. A lady quits his side and is conducted by a private staircase, or out of the yard. The moment the master throws his legs out of bed, the whole force is waiting to rush into his room, each making three salaams, by bending the body and head very low, and touching the forehead with the inside of the fingers and the floor with the back part. He condescends perhaps to nod or cast an eye towards the solicitor of his favour and protection . . . He is dressed without any greater exertion on his own part than if he was a statue. Tea and toast are taken in the break-fasting parlour ; while

the hair-dresser is doing his duty, the gentleman is eating, sipping and smoking in terms. He talks to his agent and various visitors. If any of the solicitors are of eminence, they are honoured with chairs. These ceremonies are continued perhaps till 10 o'clock; when attended by his cavalcade he is conducted to his palanquin, and preceded by eight to twelve chubdars, hurcarras, peons... they move off at a quick amble. He dines at 2 and the moment the glasses are introduced regardless of the company of ladies, the houccabardars enter, each with a houcca, and present the tube to his master watching behind and blowing the fire the whole time. At 4, dinner being over, he goes to his bed room when he is instantly undressed to his shirt... and he lies down in his bed where he sleeps until about seven or eight o'clock, when the former ceremony is repeated and clean linen of every kind as in the morning is administered. After tea he puts on a handsome coat, and pays visits of ceremony to the ladies, returns a little before 10 o'clock, supper being served at 10. The company keep together till between twelve and one in the morning, preserving great sobriety and decency, and when they depart our hero is conducted to his bedroom, where he finds a female companion to amuse him until the hour of 7 or 8 the next morning with no greater exertions than these do the company's servants amass the most splendid fortunes".

The Shahib was but a representative of the ruling class which flourished in Calcutta in the early colonial days.

Making of an Imperial City

Opinion is likely to differ if the British Empire was the outcome of a deliberate bid of British imperialism operating under the guise of mercantile ventures or if the Empire was the product of circumstances moulded not so much by deliberation as accidents, but there is no likelihood of disputing the fact that, as in many other fields of colonial exploitation, Calcutta derived its importance from its status as a port town. This is to say that its growth would have followed as a necessary eventuality with or without the Britishers' presence here. The latter no doubt gave its growth an incentive and accelerated its progress but no one could have hindered its rise so long as it enjoyed the position of a port town. The basic factor underlying Calcutta's rise to importance was not so much English connection as its potentialities as a centre of trade in import and export. The truth is borne out by the fact that though the English had several settlements in Eastern India, none was in a position to rival Calcutta—a fact to be explained in terms of the town's own potentialities as a marketing centre.

While commerce imparted to Calcutta its most distinctive feature, a sort of passport to future growth, the speed in the growth was undoubtedly lent by the rise in the political fortunes of the English. At the turn of the century with the exception of the Marathas, all the important native powers stood discomfited. The greatest achievement of the English till now was the victory over Mysore. It is not an accident that for many years the anniversary of victory over Tipu Sultan was treated as a regular annual celebration in the Government House in Calcutta. The Marathas were yet to be eliminated, but they were no longer their former selves. The Rajputs stood nearly spent-up, while the Sikhs were yet to emerge as a powerful

military power, strong enough to challenge British claim to paramountcy. Within 18 years since the opening of the 19th century the picture changed substantially marking the advent of the English as the paramount power of India. By the middle of the century the process of British imperial expansion in India had worked itself out to an extent that there remained not a single Indian power which could constitute any serious challenge to the sovereign position of the English whose command was obeyed all over the land even beyond the Indus and the Brahmaputra.

The phenomenal rise of British power in India enabled the English to make Calcutta not only the foremost centre of commercial activities but also the headquarters of an expanding empire. All eyes then turned to the capital city and its progress was accelerated with unprecedented speed. Calcutta was no longer, as Mackintosh wrote in 1782, "one of the filthiest places in the world, badly and irregularly built, it is only remarkable for a few fine buildings, scattered here and there". Count Grandpre who visited Calcutta in 1789 described it as not only the handsomest town in Asia but as one of the finest in the world. In a little over twenty years rapid strides were taken so that Lord Valentia could write in 1803 :

"The town of Calcutta is at present well worthy of being the seat of our Indian government, both from its size and from the magnificent buildings which decorate the part of it inhabited by Europeans".

The remarkable growth of the city is not only reflected in its physical boundaries and increasing population, in the improvement effected in sanitation and public health, not only in its buildings, but also in the tremendous progress achieved in the field of literary and intellectual pursuits. The rate in the growth of population is difficult to calculate since no reliable statistics are available till the last quarter of the 19th century. A survey of Calcutta's population conducted in 1821 reveals that there were 1,18,203 Hindus, 48,162 Muslims, 13,138 Christians and 414 Chinese in residence within its boundaries. A comparative study of surveys conducted between 1826 and 1836 shows that the largest community in Calcutta was that of the Bengali Hindus, the Bengali Muslims following as the

second largest. From the report on the *Census of Calcutta* (1866) it is known that the bulk of population were male adults. Another interesting fact which emerges from the various periodical census reports is that though the Bengali Muslims formed the second largest number in Calcutta's population, the upper echelon of Muslim society was formed by non-Bengali Muslims. They were either landlords or merchants or professional men like *Vakeels* and teachers. The substitution of Muslim by British-Indian administration, however, marked a tendency towards socio-economic redistribution from which both the Hindu and the Muslim upper class, employed as bureaucrats under the old Mughal system of Government suffered. In their place arose a new class whose influence was derived as officials under the British or as collaborators of the English or as traders and owners or managers of lands. In the process of this transformation the Muslims suffered more than the Hindus. With the advent of the English power, the hereditary Muslim aristocracy found the sphere of their power steadily restricted. Those who formed the lower rank in Muslim society such as artisans, labourers and peasants failed to adjust themselves to the changing situation. The Hindus, on the other hand, found new opportunities of employment as clerks and junior adjuncts of the new administrative machinery. They discovered in Western education a means for improving their prospect of employment. Thus in the growing population of Calcutta may be traced an increasing percentage of Hindu upper and middle classes who became a part and parcel of the new system from which the Muslims deliberately chose to withhold communication.

The urge for English education emanated more from private initiative than from any planned effort on the part of the rulers to foist a new culture-pattern. This urge was partly the outcome of practical consideration since a tolerable or even less than tolerable knowledge of English was considered a passport for better living. There was also the consideration of a larger interest, viz., acquaintance with the intellectual progress attained in the west.

MUNICIPAL CALCUTTA

Leaving at this stage the story of Calcutta's cultural and intellectual life, we may turn to indicate the growth of the city's population, area and the emergence of its municipal Government. From 179,917 the population grew to be 542,686 by 1901. Statistical survey reveals that the rate in the growth of population since 1751 was 52% in the next 70 years, about 110%, in the succeeding 45 years and about 52% in the following 35 years. A review of available figures of houses shows that "although the population in the old town area increased, on the whole, about 50 times in about two centuries, the number of houses increased only 11 times during the same period". It is also evident that while pucca buildings increased from 14,230 in 1821 to 38,574 in 1901 i.e. by 178% only huts decreased from 53,289 to 49,007.

Between 1742 and 1756 the area of the settlement comprised 3,229 acres according to one estimate and 6,927 acres according to another. By 1901 the area of the town came to cover 13,237 acres. The number of streets which was 27 in 1756 grew to be 328 by 1901.

The phenomenal increase in area and growth of population made it incumbent on the authorities concerned to systematise its growth, as far as practicable. It is not correct to say that the problem did not occur till much later. Evidence points to the fact that as early as 1704 the Council decided that the income derived from fines imposed on 'black inhabitants' for acts of misconduct should be spent for "filling up and obliterating foul pots and ditches that abounded in the Settlement". An order dated 10 March 1707 put a ban on erection of irregular buildings. Three years later the Council adopted measures to improve the drains and fill up the stinking and stagnant pools in the immediate vicinity of the Fort. Not much work was done partly because of lack of funds. Complaints were made in 1755 against the 'offensive condition' of the Great Tank, the principal source of the supply of drinking water. In the next year the uproar against the prevailing unhealthiness in the Fort area was so loud that an order was passed prohibiting the landing of troops in Calcutta. The roads and ditches constructed till

1762 fell far short of the needs of a growing population. The one hospital that stood near the Fort was not properly staffed to meet the challenge of tropical diseases and epidemics.

It was not till 1794 that the management of the town was entrusted to the Justices of Peace. Their special duties were concerned with 'repairing, watering and cleaning of streets' and assessment of rents. Thus was inaugurated the first municipal Government in the settlement. They started their work with commendable zeal. To them Calcutta owes its first metalled road and a contingent of 84 pairs of 'strong serviceable bullocks' for the use of the carts employed under the scavengers for cleaning the streets and drains within the town of Calcutta. Even then their performance, on the whole, was not creditable enough. The work of improvement of public roads, drains, water courses, aqueducts, bridges and similar works of public utility was entrusted to a Lottery Committee whose relation with the Justices of Peace was similar to that existing between the Corporation and the C I T to-day. Between 1814 and 1817 many important public works were undertaken by the Lottery Commissioners and between 1817 and 1836 by the Lottery Committee. As a later writer summarises:

"It may be truly said that it was under the direction of the Lottery Committee that the work of reconstructing chaotic Calcutta into a decent shape of a modern town was not only inaugurated but pushed on with vigour that handsome roadway which traverses Calcutta from north to south and includes Cornwallis Street, College Street, Wellington Street, Wellesley Street and Wood Street, was driven through the town and the fine squares—Cornwallis Square, College Square, Wellington Square, and Wellesley Square—with large tanks in their centre, were constructed at intervals along its course under the auspices of the Committee. Other streets such as Free School Street, Kyd Street, Hastings Street, Creek Row, Mangoe Lane, and Bentinck Street were also opened, straightened and widened by them. The maidan was improved by the construction of roads and paths, by excavation of tanks, and the erection of balustrades, the Strand Road was made, Colootollah Street, Amherst Street, and Mirzapore Street were laid out, and the Mirzapore tank, Soortibagan tank and several tanks in Short's Bazar were dug by the

same Committee. Several roads were metalled and arrangements for watering various streets were also made by them, an engine being fixed for that purpose at Chandpal Ghat". Above all, the historic Town Hall was Lottery's gift to the town.

The Fever Hospital and Municipal Improvement Committee superseded the Lottery Committee in 1836 and did much good work during its tenure of 12 years (1836-1848). "The monumental Report of the new Committee", it has been well said, "throws a flood of light over municipal Calcutta of this time and its sober and weighty conclusions formed a starting point for the energetic period of reform which was soon to follow". It recommended the setting up of a Central hospital, additional dispensaries, a scientific system of comprehensive drainage, town-planning and thoroughfare, excavation of large tanks and reservoirs and devised practical ways and means for raising necessary funds. The next serious attempt, the Act of 1848 was important not for what it did but for what it was—an attempt at combating the view that Calcutta by reason of its position was beyond the power of sanitary service. An Act to ensure proper conservancy in the city followed in 1856. But the problem was too vast to be dealt with by a single legislation. 7 years later was enacted a more comprehensive measure based on the principle that the most suitable form of Government for Calcutta was "one which combined popular representation with the concentration of excessive power in the hands of a highly paid officer". The outcome was the Act of 1863. It vested the general control of Municipal expenditure, and property of the town and general management of its municipal affairs in a corporation consisting of all the Justices of the Peace for Bengal, Behar and Orissa resident in Calcutta along with Justices of the Peace from the town. The new regime lasted from 1863 to 1876. A subsequent Act, Act II of 1880 increased the number of Commissioners to 75 of whom 50 were to be elected by the rate-payers. A retrograde step was, however, taken in 1899. It reduced the number of Commissioners to 50, of whom 25 were to be elected at ward contests.

Thus till the end of the century lack of adequate machinery for the proper discharge of municipal responsibilities persisted. The rate of improvement in regard to sanitation, conservancy,

maintenance of road and water supply was slow and fell far short of the needs of the growing population. Until 1857 Calcutta streets lights were oil lamps. There were only 313 oil lamps for the whole city. It was not till nearly a century later that a law was passed making it obligatory for occupiers of premises valued at or above Rs. 70/- a month to provide gate lamps at their own cost. The number of public lamps thus rose to 417 by 1854-55. Five years later the oil lamps were substituted by gas lamps. It was not till 1897 that the Indian Electric Company was commissioned to supply electricity to the Calcutta Streets, partly though.

For over a century since Plassey the town was dependent for water-supply on the river and water-tanks within its area. The first attempt at supply of filtered water was made in 1863. Seven years later the waterworks at Palta were taken over directly by the Corporation. The average consumption was then 4-1/2 million gallons. There was ground for complaint on the working of the filters during the rainy season. The quantity of supply increased within the next 6 years to 7 million gallons. But by the end of the century considerable progress was made and the supply increased to a daily average of 21 million gallons. Even then the project failed to anticipate the spectacular rise in population in the coming years. The supply to-day averages 120 million gallons, with gigantic tube-wells, in addition to the re-generated motor-works, working to full capacity but complaint about scarcity of continuous supply even today is by no means unjustified.

The problem of drainage and conservancy received serious attention for the first time in Wellesley's Minute of 1803. The drains in the early decades of the last century were but "irregular furrows in the soil without any brick work . . . in a most filthy, uncleaned state . . . doubtless highly pernicious to the health of the inhabitants.' A comprehensive scheme of underground drainage was not taken up till 1858-59. It took sixteen years to execute the scheme which provided for 5 parallel conduits of all the drainage and sewage of the town eastwards, so designed as to empty the filth into a deep well, excavated at Tangra. The project was designed for removing 15 million gallons of sewage a day. It gave the city a much cleaner and drier look. By 1875

nearly 38 miles of brick and stoneware pipe sewers of about the same length were constructed. In course of the next 3 years the drainage of the Southern Division was completed, followed by the completion of those of the North Division in 1885-86.

TRANSPORT

In Calcutta of post-Plassey days the palankeen was the principal medium of transport. Balthasar Solvyns, the Belgian artist who came and stayed in Calcutta in the last decade of the 18th century, has left visual studies of several varieties of palankeens ranging from commonplace to the most luxurious type. There are also abundant written materials on their use from both contemporary European and Indian sources. Surgeon Ives (mid-18th century) described the palki or palankeen as "a covered machine with cushions in it, arched in the middle, to give it more room and air and carried on the shoulders of 4 or 6 men". The local authorities of the Company, however, considered the palankeen as "a piece of Eastern luxury" and forbade its use by the junior clerks. But the palankeens survived the ban. At a later stage they were covered with a roof and sides, with sliding panel-doors in place of the awning and draperies. They were upholstered like carriages and painted and varnished in the same style. The most luxuriant type, the *Jhalldar* were used by the Royalties and members of the aristocracy. These were covered with rich stuffs, embroidered in silk or gold which extended over the bamboo. The end of the bamboo sometimes represented the head and tail of a tiger or some other animals. The bearers of this type of palankeens wore coloured jackets with red, blue and golden turbans. Cornwallis requisitioned the services of salons for decorating and special palankeens meant for the use of the two royal hostages from Mysore, costing between six and seven thousand rupees. *Chowpal* had a very light bed or sofa over which a large bamboo formed an arch, attended by servants carrying umbrellas. This was in demand in all great ceremonies, marriage processions etc. Long palankeens, said to have been brought to India by the Europeans were a class by themselves. These were in much use by the Europeans in Calcutta. The extensive use of the palankeen is attested by the fact that the newly built (1787) St. John's Church had to be provi-

ded with special slopes for the palankeens to approach the entrance. A palankeen-shed was built on the southern side of the churchyard.

The palkee or palankeen-bearers were, generally speaking, of the same height, sturdy and strong-sinewed persons. If there was any whose height fell short of the average, heavy cotton pads were placed on the shoulders to make up the balance. A journey, specially a long one, was not entirely uncomfortable except that the rider was well advised to carry a good supply of cotton to plug his ears with so as to keep away the choral singing indulged in by the bearers. Their bulk was recruited from Orissa. A newspaper estimate dated 1819 says that the paliki-bearers from Orissa sent home an annual remittance of no less than 3 lakhs of rupees. But then they had their grievances too. A newspaper report of 1827 says that there was a sudden dearth of bearers following the new law by which the bearers were to be paid a fixed rate per hour, irrespective of the distance they were required to cover. This was resented by many who thought that the new system would mean a fall in their income. The object of the strike was, however, defeated as immediately after, a Calcuttan, one Mr. Bromley, by a clever device, clapped a pair of shafts and 4 wheels to the palankeen, yoked a pony and drove off to his office.

A newspaper report dated 1839 informs us that in that year in Calcutta and its suburbs there were 2875 palkees for hire and 11,500 bearers.

Bullock carts antedated the palankeens and these were in use not only for transport of merchandise but also for travellers. Camels and elephants too were in use as modes of conveyance. The Daniells, for example, have left for posterity, pictures of the colourful animals used as media of transport and travel, moving along or taking rest along the streets of old Calcutta.

The bullock-carts and palankeens gradually yielded place to horse-drawn carriages which were speedier and comparatively economic. Solvyns has provided us interesting glimpses of various kinds of bullock-carts and horse-carriages. The former included *hackery* made of wood used for conveying merchandise and *Rahoo* with light body consisting merely of a pole with a

traverse of timber and 2 wheels drawn by a pair of oxen. *Rath* or chariot was a kind of 4-wheeled carriage, generally roomy and highly ornamented, possessing gratings of very thin and coloured bamboos. These were commonly drawn by a pair of sturdy oxen. Rings of gold and silver were fastened to the nose and the horns of these oxen, their hoofs and tails were painted red.

In 1790 Count Grandpre wrote that, apart from palankeens, chariots, whiskies and phaetons occasioned in the evening as great a bustle in Calcutta streets as in any of the principal towns of Europe. The writer of an article in the *Calcutta Review* of 1844 speaks of as many as 10 varieties of carriages on the Calcutta streets. In the words of Kathleen Blechynden :

“A great deal of emulation and rivalry used to be shown in the decoration and appointments of these fine carriages, and the chariots especially were very gorgeous affairs with their great springs, and deep bodies, the handsome hammer-cloth and silver mounted harness, the coachman in flat disclike turban, with crested bonds across and full cummerband or waist-cloth ; and the running footmen with their chowries or fly-whisks of great yak’s tails mounted on silver handles, slung across the shoulder. A handsome carriage of her own was the ambition of every young lady of proper spirit, which led to the bachelor’s fine equipage being called ‘a wife-trap by the wits of the day’. Sedan chairs were also used. The *Tonjon*, a chair with moveable hood became popular, its chief patron being Lady William Bentinck.

Tramways came much later. These were at first conceived of as transport of traffic—the removal of country produce from Sealdah Station to the godowns near the Strand and Sobhabazar where the wholesale merchants used to store them. The first tramway was constructed in February 1873—starting at Sealdah it ran along Baithakhana, Bowbazar and Dalhousie Square along Strand to the terminus at Armenian Ghat. The line was worked for the conveyance of passengers only upto the 20th November 1873 at a loss of Rs. 500/- per month. It was then decided to close the line. Five years later in 1878 schemes for a revised and complete system of tramways was submitted. In October 1879 an agreement was concluded between the Corporation and the Calcutta Tramways Co. Ltd.

It was exactly after a year that the Corporation gave a certificate authorising trams to run along the Bow Bazar line and then along Hare Street. The cars were at first drawn by horses. Casualties were rather heavy as the horses were put to the severe strain of Calcutta heat. In May 1882 steam tractor was introduced as an experimental measure to run steam engines on the Chowringhee line. After a year it was discontinued. Electric system replaced horse traction in 1902.

From available records it appears that bicycles made their first appearance on the streets of Calcutta in 1889. Motor cars followed in 1896. Taxis did not come in vogue till 1906. Public buses like the first tram car were drawn by horses. The first horse-drawn buses are known to have plied in 1830. Motor buses were introduced in 1922. Rickshaws came into use in Calcutta in 1913-14. In rainy seasons these are considered indispensable for negotiating through water-logged streets of Calcutta. To add to these, there is a whole range of tempos, lorries, vans, hand carts and bullock-carts which are regular features in any Calcutta Street. They do not ordinarily carry human loads, but they do make the streets densely congested making traffic confusion more confounded. The sounds, smells and pollution lent by horns, petrol and diesel of this endless stream of carriages are not only a torture for the ears and eyes, but one would be lucky if they do not affect one's pulse or heart beats.

The river presents a quieter scene. The 18th century scene is indeed captivating. Solvyns who did not neglect transport by water has left a graphic description heightened by lively sketches of a variety of boats, the *dinghee*, the *budgerow*, the *pinance*, the *Bhawalia* and the *Mayurpankhee*. A journey by budgerow was very pleasant even though its movement was slower than that of a palankeen. The fastest moving boat was of course the *Bhawalia* with its extremely light body. There is the instance of such a boat performing its voyage from Lucknow to Calcutta in 8 days. It was so light that nobody could change his position without causing a violent jerk to the whole boat.

STREETS, BUILDINGS AND ARCHITECTURE

The earliest pictorial glimpses of Calcutta streets and buildings are provided by the Daniells. *The Twelve Views of Calcutta*

published in 1786-88 were completed within two years of their arrival in the town. These streets and buildings are nearly located in the European or White town. For the streets and lanes of the Native Town we have to depend on literary and not on pictorial sources. The earliest available records mention only one main road, the *Pilgrim's Road* which ran north-south, connecting Sutanuti with Govindapur. A later survey informs us that in the first decade of the 18th century there were only 2 roads and 2 lanes. In the next two decades the number of roads and lanes rose to 4 and 8 respectively. The survey undertaken in 1742 reveals that the number of roads grew to be 27 and of lanes to 52. Byc-lanes which are not mentioned in 1742 records numbered 74 in 1756. The only road in 1756 that is given a name is the '*Avenue leading to the Eastward*', much later named as Bow Bazar street. All these roads, lanes and byc-lanes were *kucha* or mud-built. The only transport that moved along these were the palankeens and animal-drawn carts. The first *pucca* road did not come into existence till 1799 when the road, where once the Maratha Ditch stood, was paved with brick. Roads made of stone-chips did not come in vogue till much later, permitting horse-drawn carriages to move along them. In the pre-1784 old available maps of Calcutta, the roads are shown without names, since roads did not receive names till much later. In the Plan of Calcutta "reduced by permission of the Commissioners of Police from the original one executed for them by Lieut. Colonel Mark Wood in the years 1784 and 1785 and published in October 1792 by William Baillie" the streets are indicated with names for the first time. There are altogether 109 entries in the list of locations shown. 28 of them refer to important sites in the European town, in 59 cases names given are those derived from bazars, bagans, ghats, tollas, tanks and places of importance located therein. Roads named after individuals are only 21, 15 of them are named after the early representatives of the ruling class—Clive, Vansittart, Wheler, Larkin, Hastings, Lyons, Weston and others, only one bears the name of a Muslim, named Ahmed Jummadaur's in Talpookur area. Six of the roads are named after prominent Bengali Hindus—Madan Dutta, Neeloo Dalal, Prankrishna Baboo, Muk-taram Baboo, Narain Chatterjee and Balaram Ghosh. The

number of ghats shown along the eastern bank of the Hooghly is 33.

Upjohn's map of Calcutta and its environs, 1792-93 from an accurate survey gives more details. The number of ghats indicated in the map is 37. References mention 58 entries shown under 6 zonal divisions, viz. North of Writers Buildings and West of Chitpore Road; North of Bow Bazar and East of Chitpore Road; between Council House Street and Court House Street; between Court House Street and Cossaitollah; between Bow Bazar and Dhurromtollah; and South of Dhurromtollah. The number of streets and ghats named after the Indians is larger than those depicted in Wood's Plan. But the surveyor himself admits "the names of streets are inserted in those whose width would admit of it—those of others are to be found in the References. The extent of ground on which each garden is particularly delineated, but the Houses in the Native part of the Town were not separately surveyed for that purpose". It is thus clear that the Native Town got much less attention than its counterpart inhabited by the Europeans. The most striking innovation in Upjohn's map is the indication of Rajah Nobakissen's house and the great pagoda. Schalch's Plan of Calcutta (1825) attests to the emergence of numerous new roads on the one hand, and concentration of larger habitation in areas earlier populated sparsely and increase in the number of pools which owed their existence to excavations of vast areas for the purpose of raising the level of land for masonry constructions on the other. It is also evident that as late as 1825 vast stretches of lands in the northern and eastern sectors of the town continued to remain uninhabited.

An examination of names by which Calcutta streets were known reveals some interesting features. All the streets laid up under the initiative of the Lottery Committee bore the names of individuals representing the ruling class—Elliot, Prinsep, Wood, Wellesley, Wellington, Cornwallis, Hastings, Moira, Loudon, Amherst, Rawdon, Hungerford, for instance. It was fashionable for streets and squares in Calcutta to be named after the Governor-Generals, from Warren Hastings to Canning and nearly all the Viceroys down to Hardinge. Even the Lieut-Governors and Governors had their share. Civilians, judges and

advocates were not neglected either. Ecclesiastics too had their quota. Compared to the number of the Europeans, the number of Indians, at the beginning was lesser. With the growth of roads, lanes and bye-lanes particularly in the Indian sector of the settlement, the names of Indians whose prominence was derived from collaboration with the ruling classes found an opportunity of this cheap means of commemoration—Raja Rajballav, Nobokrisna, Ratan Sarkar, Baishnab Charan Seth, Banamali Sarkar, Darpanarain Tagore, Biswanath Motilal, Motilal Seal, Nandaram Sen, Baranasi Ghose, Hari Ghosh, Mathuramohan Sen, Nilmoney Mitra, Raja Woodmanta and others. Prominent individuals hailing from other parts of India but settled in Calcutta also received due recognition—Omichand, Hazurimall, Cossinath, Monohar Das, Falgoon Das, Rustomji Cowasji, to name a few. What is remarkable is that a number of roads and lanes received their names from individuals, men and women, of obscure origin who formed the so-called lower strata in the social set up—a Panchce Dhopani, a Chhaku or a Missir Khansama, a Nanku Jamadar, a Khyroo Methad, an Anis Barber, a Sarif Duptry, Rafiq Sarangi, a Ramhari, a Ram Kanai or an Akhil Mistry, a Chhidam Moodi, a Shama Bai and so on. In many cases names were derived from the profession of the majority occupiers in a particular area like Cossaitolla, Kumartoli, Patuatola, Goaltuli, Sankharitolla, Kansaritolla, Shyekrapara, Darjipara etc. In many instances, roads received their names from the bazars—Bag Bazar, Shambazar, Tiretta Bazar, Sobha Bazar, Bow Bazar, Radha Bazar and so on. A good many streets-names end in *bagans* like Halsibagan, Hatibagan, Kalabagan, Goabagan, Pearabagan, Atabagan, Hurtakibagan, Phoolbagan, Badurbagan etc. Some of the names are self-revealing like the Serpentine Lane, Zigzag Lane, Crooked Lane, Corkscrew Lane. There are also streets named after trees like Neem, Nebu, Tal, Bamboo, Jhau etc. Gods and goddesses too were not spared. A large number of sites and streets like Kalighat, Bhowanipore, Govindapur, Chitpur, Kalitolla, Sibtolla, Panchanantola owe their names to one or other presiding deity. The ancient sages or saints too were not neglected. Calcutta streets today are known to bear the names of Janak, Valmiki, Parasar and Janmejaya. A climax is provi-

ded by Praetoria Street, so named to celebrate the unfurling of the British flag in the African town which still survives.

From 1877 the Municipal Commissioners began to associate the streets and roads with more Indian names than attempted before. Men of eminence, either because of their learning or literary pursuits, public service—lawyers, physicians, educationists, social reformers, religious leaders were sought to be commemorated through Calcutta's streets and parks—Dwarkanath Tagore, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Devendranath Tagore, Haris Chandra Mukherjee, Narendranath Sen, Keshab Chandra Sen, Ramkrishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekananda, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Ramesh Chandra Datta, Giris Ghosh, Michael Madhusudan Dutta, Rabindranath Tagore, Bipin Chandra Pal, Sri Aurobinda—all of them and many others had their share of posthumous honour. The municipal authorities have become more liberal today and have chosen to name some of the streets and parks after men of international eminence like William Shakespeare, Karl Marx, Lenin, Ho Chi Minh and Charlie Chaplin. Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Lala Lajpat Rai, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, Maulana A. K. Azad, B. G. Tilak, G. K. Gokhale, Mr. Iqbal, Mirza Ghalib as well as persons of foreign origin who identified themselves with the city of their adoption like David Hare and Sister Nivedita, alike adorn the names of Calcutta streets. Participants in militant nationalist struggle like Rashbehari Bose, Khudiram Bose, Satyen Bose, Barin Ghosh, Bepin Behari Ganguly, Jatin Das, Surya Sen, Troilokya Chakraborty (Maharaj) are also the recipients of this distinction at the disposal of the city fathers.

Some of the older names are known to have acquired new nomenclatures. No one can perhaps object to Ahiritola 2nd Lane or the Charakdanga Road acquiring new names after prominent citizens of the locality. But such changes have occurred even in respect of names of individuals, not necessarily belonging to the ruling class, making way for others in an uncere-
monious manner—Banamali Chatterjee yielding to Shyama Charan Mukherjee or Asutosh Kali replacing Chandi Ghosh. But one is likely to be disturbed that a street named after Prinsep or Kyd or a road with old historical association like Free School should have been rechristened. We seem to have

acquiesced in the propriety of giving a new name to the tall, curious and composite monument raised as a public testimony to the memory of General Ochterlony without asking ourselves the question if the Sahids to whom it is now dedicated did not deserve a column of their own and not at the expense of any body else's. The only unchanging thing, we are told, is that changes are bound to occur. And therein we seek our comfort.

There are today 2125 roads, streets and lanes in Calcutta. Most of them derive their name from individuals. It will be quite a tough job for any one who would attempt to prepare sketches on them.

Until a decade and a half ago Calcutta could rightly boast of a large number of monuments in the form of exquisitely executed statues and busts. They used to adorn the Calcutta maidan. A visitor to Calcutta today, repeating his visit 20 years ago, will perhaps feel a sense of surprise mingled with nostalgia at the disappearance of the group of fine monuments which lent to the Maidan a distinctive charm. To many, the reason for their disappearance, is likely to appear as far from convincing. The statues have been supposedly removed from public view as they appear to glorify some of the representatives of the once ruling classes in India. In England, we are told, that in spite of the four centuries of subjection to Roman rule and occupation of the island, the people there are particularly keen to collect and preserve all items and relics of Roman times with utmost care. But we chose to banish the statues perhaps in the hope that their removal would be the first step in the removal of the chapter on British rule in India.

Since the removal is a settled fact, there is hardly any need to stress the point further. As for many years these statues were part of the Maidan and of the city, it would be proper at least to recall whose likenesses these were. Two most remarkable statues—one depicting Warren Hastings, as a patron of oriental learning, flanked by a Hindu Pandit and Muslim theologian and the other representing Earl Cornwallis in Roman toga, at one time adorned the Town Hall. Luckily these are now on display in the open quadrangles of the Victoria Memo-

rial Building. The Memorial till now, also contains the statues of Clive, Wellesley, Marquis of Hastings and Dalhousie—all specimens of superb sculptural work by first-rate British artists. Perhaps the most remarkable work in the sculptor's art to be found, east of the Suez, is the equestrian statue of Sir James Outram which can be still seen on the grounds of the Memorial. Among others perpetuated in bronze and displayed on the same grounds are Lord William Bentinck, its pedestal reproducing a 'Suttee' scene and Lord Ripon, generally regarded as the best representative of the British Liberal school. Gone from the Calcutta scene are Auckland, Hardinge, William Peel, "the Handy Man" of the Mutiny, 'Clemency Canning, Lawrence, Mayo, Northbrook, Dufferin, Lansdowne, Generals Napier and Roberts, besides lesser personages like James Wilson, Sir Ashley Eden, Sir Stuart Bayley, and Sir John Woodburn.

Those that survive in several public places in Calcutta outside of the Maidan are David Hare, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Kristo Das Pal, Sir Edward Hyde-East, Maharaja Romanath Tagore, and in busts Peary Chand Mitra, Ram Gopal Ghose, Sri Henry Cotton, Raja Radha Kanta Dev, Prosunno Kumar Tagore and Surendra Nath Banerjea all done in the British days. Post-independence Calcutta availed itself of the opportunity of setting up a few statues of prominent Indians like Swami Vivekananda, B. G. Tilak, Deshbandhu C. R. Das, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobinda, Netaji Subhas Chandra, Khudiram Bose, Matangini Hazra, Rani Rashmoni, Surya Sen, Bagha Jatin and Pritilata Wadedar in different parts of the Maidan. Outside the Maidan the statues recently erected are those of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindra Nath Tagore and Bidhan Chandra Roy; with the exception of the last—named which is in marble, all are bronze-made. A few names of eminent Indians are stated to be under contemplation for posthumous sculptural honour.

Apart from statuary and busts, there are a few other relics and monuments of British days like the Prinsep Ghat and the Gwalior Monument both on the Strand, the Macdonal Fountain (at the head of the Old Post Office Street), the Ochterlony Monument, a composite Moslem structure of Syrian, Egyptian

and Turkish designs, the Panioty marble fountain (at the corner of Esplanade Row East and the Old Court House Street) and a white marble statue of Maharaja Sir Lakshiswar Singh Bahadur of Darbhanga (B. B. D. Bagh). The South Park Street cemetery is yet another repository of sepulchral relics which are a vital link with Calcutta's past history. As observed in a recent publication on the South Part Street cemetery, "Less hallowed by age but of no mean historical interest are the tombs and mausolea looming in the old cemeteries of Calcutta in memory of the Europeans who spent their short span in a distant land, many for gain, some for glory as in service of their country, a few for their faith, others to keep the king's peace or enrich an ancient culture with offerings of their own. These sentinels of the past speak silently of the way of life, the habits, hopes and fears of a generation that walked and talked in the once fevered expanse of this city a century or two ago". Calcutta will lose much of its historic glory if steps are not taken for its proper maintenance.

Another monument, named after J. Z. Holwell remained for many years as a reminder to the so-called Black Hole Tragedy. The original obelisk was erected by Holwell, one of the few survivors of the tragedy on the site facing the eastern curtain of the ruined fort. The structure, tradition informs us, was struck by lightning and disappeared. Its remnants were taken down in 1821 under order of the Marquess of Hastings. Some have expressed doubts about the surmise that the step was dictated by the Governor-General's extreme sensibility which led him to consider the reputation of this relic of the past politically undesirable as likely to wound the feelings of the Indians and to recall at the same time the memories of disaster to the English arms. 80 years later a white marble replica of the original brick and plaster structure was erected at the initiative of Curzon who regarded as authentic the story of Holwell which many others, on good grounds, doubted and considered as highly exaggerated, or even as "a hoax". The hoax was later removed from public view to the quiet churchyard of St. John.

St. John Churchyard too is one of the oldest historical sites of Calcutta. It contains the mausoleum of Job Charnock, the

earliest surviving historical monument of the city, in addition to the tombs of several other British men and women like Surgeon Hamilton, Charles Watson, Billy Speke, Begum Johnson, among others, who played important roles in the early years of British rule in Bengal. This site, because of its historical association, deserves to be declared a 'conservation area' following the practice adopted in countries which have any thought for the past. Any change in its landscape will be an assault on Calcutta's heritage.

A visitor to the city with some interest in or knowledge of its history and background will perhaps experience a sense of disappointment that sculptural materials relating to Calcutta's past have failed to receive the attention they deserve. He would reasonably expect to be in a place where vistas of the past unfold themselves, represented by statues of Indians and foreigners who had some role to play in the country's history, plaques or reliefs depicting historical events such as the street battles fought in Calcutta in 1756, the trial and execution of Maharaja Nandakumar, the staging of Bengali dramas in one private house or another, meetings and processions in protest against Bengal partition of 1905, houses of detention of the sons of Tipu Sultan and the former rulers of Oudh and Kabul and select Calcutta street scenes based on the late 18th century authentic pictures, observance of social rites, rituals and entertainments peculiar to Calcutta, collection and display (and reconstruction through proper media where originals are not available) of old lamp posts, letter-boxes, garden benches, fountains, troughs, models of old forgotten media of transport and places showing sites of old historic houses in the old Indian town that are no more extant and reconstruction of roads and lanes of the early 18th century Calcutta. Such an open air theatre would be an object alike of interest and knowledge and pride as much to the Calcuttans as to the people visiting the city.

CALCUTTA'S ARCHITECTURE

Calcutta architecture in the form of old official edifices, several of which survive to this day, is predominantly colonial in concept and execution. In the days before and for some

time after the landing of Job Charnock no pucca structure except the small brick-church of the Portuguese founded in 1700 is known to have been built. The claim that the *cutchery* house of the Savarna Chaudhuris in Lall dighee area was a pucca building rests on doubtful evidence. Statistics available point to the fact that the number of pucca houses in Calcutta in 1706 was only 8. Among these were the Fort, the warehouse, a single-storied house for the use of the Company's servants, the first Writers' Buildings, a barrack for soldiers and a hospital. By 1742 the number of masonry houses within the palisaded town rose to 70. The rate of increase was rapid in course of the next 14 years. In 1756 the number increased to 498. The area was too congested for the houses built within it. In the Indian sector of the town Omichand the broker and Govindaram, usually known as Black Zamindar, were the proud owners of 2 *pucca* houses in Halsibagan site. By and large, houses built for residential purposes were made of thatch and mud and were one-storied. "Such houses", it is said, "were appropriated for the use of the junior servants of the Company and the writers in the Fort which having been on the groundfloor and in damp situations, proved fatal to good many of them." Even as late as 1758 houses with thatched roofs are known to have been built for the writers and officers of Colonel Coote.

The more well-to-do among the Company's officers sought less congested sites where they could live more comfortably and built for themselves houses in the suburbs at Garden Reach, Alipore, Dum Dum and Barasat. In contrast to houses in the immediate vicinity of the fort, some of the suburban residences, situated on open and spacious grounds, derived the name of bungalows, others received the simpler appellation of garden houses. William Hodges in his *Travels* (1781-83) describes the bungalows as "buildings in India, generally raised on a base of brick one, two or three feet from the ground land, consist of only one storey; the plan of them usually is a large room in the centre for an eating and sitting room, and rooms at each corner for sleeping, the whole is covered with one general thatch, which comes low to each side, the spaces between the angle rooms are *viranders* or open porticoes some time the

centre *viranders* at each end are converted into one room". These houses attest on the one hand, to the Britisher's preference for comfortable, if not luxurious living which the settlement in its early days, was unable to offer and on the other, the readiness of the foreign owners to adjust themselves to the norms of house-building as observed by the people among whom they had chosen to live.

It was only after the settlement had begun to outgrow the Tank Square area, to the east, the south and to some extent northward that residences were permitted to be spacious and imposing. Many such houses thus appeared along Esplanade Row and Chowringhee, besides Bow Bazar and Circular Road between 1758 and 1794.

"The pre-requisites" writes Sten Nilsson, author of *European Architecture in India 1750-1850*, "for these buildings were special and quite different from those in contemporary London and other English towns. It was easy and cheap to buy sites, and the same was true of material and labour costs. The houses could well be designed with large dimension as there were always numerous servants available for the necessary communication between the different parts of the building. Thus the houses were large and of an external design remote from the Puritan ideals".

Before long, however, houses built in these areas tended to be less spacious and the compound area was substantially reduced. This was inevitable since there had been a steady rise in the value of lands following the growing demand for more houses in order to accommodate the rising population of the town. Investment in land thus held out a great prospect. Many opulent families, the Basacks, the Seals, the Mullicks, Mitras etc. and individuals like Baretto, Sukea, Omi Chand and Huzari Mal who earlier derived their wealth mainly from trade preferred investment on land. This resulted in the setting up of a number of garden houses. Such houses were most abundant in the eastern site—Sealdah, Baithakkhana, Belia-ghata besides Garden Reach, Alipore, Russapagla in the south, Belgachhia and Baranagore in the north and Sulkea and Thana situated on the western bank of the river.

The residential houses, distinct from garden houses, owned or tenanted by the Europeans in the mid-18th century "lay scattered in spacious and separate enclosures without flues, venetians and glass windows but with panelled doors and frames with a network of cane." Their Indian counterparts, in pucca buildings and obviously owned by the wealthier section of the Indian population in Calcutta, were less attractive, being situated in narrow and congested streets and lanes. We are informed on the authority of Sir William Jones that the Indian town was "overcrowded with men living in badly built, unimpressive houses, with a few exceptions, even the houses of the opulent Indians were not built to please the eye". The Daniells who lived in Calcutta for some time when Jones worked in India, drew the picture of a two-storied house of a native merchant in Chitpore Road (1792). This house, the artists observed, was built in the style of its ornamental parts "Muhammedan except in the turret, which is an unsuccessful attempt of the Graecian, as introduced in modern Indian buildings". But this seems an exception. The one general rule that seems applicable is that unlike a capital city of the Mughals like Agra and Delhi, Calcutta did not develop, in pre-British days, any specific form of architectural concepts strictly derived from the Moslems. And since pucca buildings did not begin to raise their heads till after the arrival of the British, the residential buildings, as distinct from temples, did not conform to any elaborately planned norm either dating back to orthodox Hindu architectural tradition or the recent examples of the newly arrived Britishers or Europeans in Calcutta. On the other hand, they conformed to practical consideration made obligatory by reason of availability of space and materials, social status and economic resources of the owner and the demands of climate and temperature. The disappearance of many of the old Indian family residences on the one hand, and the absence of any pictorial records of the interior of the houses that survived until a few years back or are still to be seen, made it difficult, if not impossible, to describe their architectural features. But it is possible to discern in them some distinctive features. The house of an opulent Indian was generally divided into several *mahals* or sectors. The outer sector accommodated the

office and the drawing room, and inner ones contained the family apartments; a spacious court-yard stood intervening between the two sectors, in many cases, equipped with a sanctuary for the worship of the family deity, overlooking a hall where social and religious rites and rituals were held. There was also provision of separate and smaller houses for the accommodation of the employees and domestic servants, forming a cluster of houses and stables, in one large complex—a sort of miniature semi-feudal establishment.

In the second and revised edition of *Anglo-Indian Domestic Life* Colesworthy Grant writes :

“The residences of the respectable and rich Hindoos form a remarkable contrast with those of their poorer countrymen, being built of brick . . . Instead of an apartment surrounded by a veranda, it is a veranda surrounded by apartments . . . The centre of the building is an open courtyard or area, but this, in times of festivities, is converted into a large apartment, by temporarily matting and carpetting the floor and covering the room with an immense cloth roof”.

The author recalls a curious incident when a Hindu gentleman of Calcutta, desiring to gratify the female members of his family by the sight of an European equestrian performance, converted this area with the usual material of earth and sawdust, into a circus, and engaged a French equestrian corps, then in Calcutta, to perform in private at his own house.

The houses of middle-class Indians were necessarily less spacious and lacking in gorgeousness. But the number of rooms was by no means inconsiderable. This was because of the fact that a middle-class family in Calcutta of the late 18th and throughout the following century was a joint family consisting of a large number of members. The other nearly inevitable feature of a Hindu dwelling house was the provision of a room exclusively meant for the worship of the female deity. A probate dated 1858 on the inventory of landed properties belonging to Asutosh De includes, among others, “a moiety of joint family dwelling house at Simlah together with land” (not mentioned whether set apart for religious purposes). A typical example

of the house of an affluent Calcutta family is provided in the words of a contemporary as follows :

“Deep in the recess of the Black town....stands the mansion of that branch of the Bysack family of which Nilcomol is the head. It is of the kind of which there are so many specimens in these regions. Outwardly a square dungeon-keep like erection of dark red brick, with a turret at one corner ; inwardly it exhibits two or three tiers of wooden galleries surrounding an open quadrangular court. It is, like most of Hindu family mansions, populous as a rabbit warren. As but a portion of its inhabitants we may reckon up the Baboo and his wife, his five sons and their five wives, his three daughters and their three husbands, with a matter of about twenty grand-children.”

It is a pity, as said earlier, that no contemporary artist, Indian or European, has left a picture of a middle-class Indian residence in Calcutta two hundred years back. Colesworthy Grant has to his credit one or two brilliant sketches showing some Calcutta houses with their quadrangles, staircases and rooms.

Those living below the upper middle class rank lived in thatched houses. It was not till 1837 that the first law was enacted putting a ban on the erection of straw-roofed or matted huts which had for many years been responsible for the disastrous fires that frequently overtook the town. The number of thatched houses already in existence then was 30,567 against 20,304 tiled houses.

The real glory of Calcutta's architecture is thus to be sought in the edifices in the English town and in its temples and other houses of worship.

The earliest surviving Calcutta's historical relic is Charnock's Mausoleum, located in St. John's Churchyard. The Rev. H. B. Hyde describes it as “a massive structure, octagonal in shape with a double dome. In each face there is a low and narrow archway. It was placed so immediately to form the original entrance to the Burying Ground”. The importance of the relic is due more to historical than to architectural glory though there has been a lot of speculation on the petrology

of Job Charnock's tombstone and the rock that went to its making—the *Charnockite*, as christened by Thomas H. Holland of the Geological survey of India (1893).

The next piece of architecture that deserves notice is the New Fort William completed in 1773 at a cost of two millions sterling. Dr. W. K. Firminger describes it as "perhaps one of the finest things of its kind ever built from the point of view of XVIIIth century military architecture". In form an irregular octagon, it has 7 gates with 5 sides towards the land and 3 towards the river, accommodating all the essentials of a military headquarter like ditch, barracks, armouries, bastions, arsenals, garrisons, store-rooms, magazines, parade ground, residences of the Commander-in-Chief, Chief Staff Officer, Officer Commanding the Presidency District, dining halls, messes, chapels and even 2 churches (one of which is now converted into a library).

Another old piece of architecture dating back to the late 18th century is the Writers' Buildings which dominates to this day the Tank Square scene. Its architecture is more massive than grand. The site on which it stands was leased out to Thomas Lyon in 1776. Four years later it became the property of Richard Barwell, a friend and colleague of Warren Hastings. The new owner set up 19 sets of apartments for the residence of the junior servants of the Company. Here they were used to fast and extravagant ways of living. Each occupant was required to pay a rent of 200 Arcot rupees per month. After a few years the writers were made to vacate the apartments and arrange for their stay elsewhere. For several years the building was not in use till it was converted into office or Secretariat which it still remains with embellishments and domes, besides a new storey, added to its bare range.

Tom Raw the Griffin (1828) described the Buildings as follows :

"There to the northward, in one even line the
Writers' Buildings stand—nineteen in number
Where young civilians prosper or decline
As study spurs them, or o'er books they clumber".

Belvedere in Alipore which now accommodates the

National Library had its origin dating back to the mid-18th century. It passed through several transfers of ownership till this "Superb mansion" was acquired on purchase for the residence of the Lt. Governor. Its architecture, a curious mixture of a variety of styles and proportions, has been described as "a Free Italian Renaissance style developed on an ordinary Anglo-Indian building". The memory of the duel between Hastings and Francis fought on a site once forming one of the walks of the Belvedere Garden has lent to it an interest which is yet to fade.

The advent of the 19th century saw colonial architecture at its best. The most remarkable example is the Government House, now known as the *Raj Bhavan*, even after the Raj had long ceased to exist. The first house accommodating the Company's head was located in the Old Fort complex itself. At a later stage a new house was provided for the Governor on the river bank a little to the south of the Old Fort. This house, described by Captain Alexander Hamilton (1709) as "the best and most regular piece of architecture that I ever saw in India", it appears, was not in occupation of the Governor for long. The next Government House, also known as the Company's House, was a three-storeyed building which stood the siege of 1756 and then was abandoned.

The next building assigned to the Governor was the New Council House. In Wood's Map (1784) the location of this House is shown on a site on the Esplanade Row at the point where the Old Court House Street meets it on the west. At a later stage Hastings moved to a house the owner of which Md Reza Khan named it as the Buckingham House. Warren Hastings and his two immediate successors are known to have lived in it. Hastings did not like it for its lack of elegance. Grandpre who visited the settlement in 1790 wrote :

"He (The Governor-General) lives in a house on the esplanade opposite the citadel. Many private individuals in the Town have houses as good. The house of the Governor of Pondicherry is much more magnificent".

Wellesley resolved to make up the deficiency. This "Sultanised Englishman", as Mackintosh described the Governor-General, was convinced that it was proper that "India should

be governed from a palace and not from a counting house, with the ideas of a Prince and with not those of a retail-dealer in muslins and indigo". Captain Charles Wyatt of the Corps of Engineers designed the Central Building connected by galleries with 4 distinct wings, on the model of Kedleston Hall, Derbyshire, conforming to Queen Anne and Georgian pediment and portico style. Its gates, it has been said, "are a mixed reproduction of those belonging to Syar House in Middlesex and Wiltshire". The writer of Lady Curzon's biography observes that the Calcutta house, though the plan was the same as Kedleston's "is larger and at the same time meaner". Lord Valentia who described it as "a noble structure" in 1803 failed to notice a serious flaw from which it suffers, namely, its want of height. The Dane C. A. Bluhme, a member of the Council of Tranquebar, who visited Calcutta in 1824 was impressed by the external grandeur of the building but felt disappointed with the interior—low ceilings, tasteless decoration and ravages by termites.

In a number of other buildings the influence of the style and technique of European architecture is markedly manifest. The Town Hall, designed by Colonel Garstin, with its impressive Doric columns and magnificent flight of steps is a notable addition to Calcutta's architecture (1813). Another outstanding example of colonial architecture in Calcutta is provided by the house which today accommodates the Royal Calcutta Turf Club of Russell Street. Described as "one of the finest and best preserved examples of the original buildings in the area, the house front recalls many palladium-inspired facades in Europe".

The Metcalfe Hall, the earliest original house of Calcutta's first Public Library for many years, was one of the city's landmarks. It was a memorial to Sir Charles Metcalfe who officiated as Governor-General for a little over 12 months in 1835-36 after having distinguished himself as a civil servant and was hailed as "the emancipator of the Indian press". The building was designed by C. K. Robinson who chose the portico of the Temple of the Winds in Athens as his model for the construction. Robinson also gave Calcutta another of its landmarks—the Ochterlony Monument.

A remarkable example of the imitation of Greek style of architecture is the Mint (discarded since a new house was found for it in Alipore). It was erected in accordance with the design of Major W. N. Forbes, R. E. ; its portico is but a replica in half of Minerva's Temple in Athens.

Calcutta's architecture for many years took pride in the Senate House built in 1873. It was a massive structure fronted by a lofty portico, supported by well-laid Ionic columns. Its disappearance, yielding place to a mammoth sky-scraper, is regretted by all lovers of the past. The foundations of the High Court, an imposing, spectacular building in the Gothic style of architecture were laid in March 1864 and completed in 1872. It is the work of Walter Granville, the then Government Architect and is supposedly built on the model of the Town Hall of Ypres. The resemblance is so close that any viewer may be pardoned if he thought that the highest seat of justice in the state was brought over from Belgium. In emphasising this resemblance a recent writer has drawn attention to a persistent myth. To quote him :

"It is said that when the Belgians lost their Town Hall by bombardment during the Great War they immediately sought the plans of Calcutta High Court so that they might re-build their original faultlessly though no one can ever lead you to the source of the stimulated myth".

In course of the next three decades and half between 1870 and 1905 many more elegant buildings were added to Calcutta's city-scape—the General Post Office with its Corinthian columns, the Telegraph Office with a tower resembling an Italian campanile (1873), the New Market of 1874, the Indian Museum with its facade constructed after the Italian style, its projecting wings and the central portico provided with elegant Corinthian columns (1875), the Currency Office, a lofty building in the Italian style of architecture, the New Customs House in 1899 and the Central Municipal Building completed in 1905.

Among the mansions owned by the opulent Indians that deserve mention are the Tagore Baithakhanna built in 1830 after a design drawn by a French architect, the Marble Palace in Mukhtaram Baboo Street (1835) described by a modern

art-critic as "the grandest, most pretentious and extraordinary of Calcutta's stately houses and a city showpiece", Jhamapookur Rajbati (now a thing of the past), Vijay Manzil exhibiting distinctly Muslim architectural style, the Tagore villa on the Hooghly, Sovabazar Rajbati now in a dilapidated state, the Tagore Castle off Chitpore Road, the tragically beautiful house of Kaliprasanna Sinha in Banarasi Ghosh Street, the Turf Club House and the Belgacchhia villa.

The buildings described above all bear witness to the influence of neo-classical architecture tinged with elements drawn from Moslem style. This was because of conscious efforts of the architects who came to imbibe a sort of veneration for Mughal architecture as a sort of established symbol of imperial glory. It is also to be remembered that quite a large number of Calcutta's palatial buildings were planned by architects who belonged to the Engineering corps of the Company or of the Crown besides one or two government architects. It is well to remember that they worked under two main limitations, viz., that all of them did not possess any prior experience of planning buildings, before they had gone to India, apart from some theoretical background and that they had to rely on materials such as were locally available. They experimented at the beginning with the classical style with porticos as tall as the buildings. But from practical experience they soon discovered that tall porticos let in too much sun in the afternoon. Thus the houses built later were provided with lower porticos, venetian blinds and extra shutters on glass windows. Unlike the smaller houses in contemporary England with simple decorations they preferred to go in for spacious palatial types of buildings with rich ornamentations and decorative designs. This resulted in a hybrid style of architecture which displayed elements—classical, neo-classical and Muslim styles—all dexterously combined together.

It was in the first decade of the present century that the foundations were laid of the most spectacular and imposing building in Calcutta—the Memorial named after Queen Victoria. It is the only building, beyond the shores of England, to have been planned by an architect of the eminence as the President of the British Institute of Architects, Sir William Emerson.

His only architectural work in London is the Hamilton House. Whatever professional frustrations he might have suffered, was more than compensated by his grand work in Calcutta. As a recent writer on Calcutta observes :

“Whatever professional frustrations Sir William may have suffered from at home, he let them all loose in one majestic throw right here. They landed amidst sixty-four acres of lawns, ponds, shrubbery and herbaceous borders and nothing in Calcutta ever had more pleasing or more amply open surrounding. Here, as you walk up one of the drives, past the bronze Victoria on her throne, or the bronze Edward VII on his horse, or the marble Curzon looking very stern and ruly, you behold something which is more palatial than memorial, a great white cliff which in Calcutta’s light hurts the eyes, with its vaguely Renaissance sides ending at each corner in a sort of minarets, with its entrance arches soaring through two high storeyes, with its entire rambling derivative, nostalgic and impressive rectangle dominated by a colonnaded dome (the Taj, with concessions to St. Paul’s Cathedral, may be) which is itself capped by three tons of bronzed and victorious angel.”

Calcutta may take legitimate pride in the richness and varieties of the houses of worship it possesses, representing nearly all religious denominations and thus emphasising the cosmopolitan composition of its population. The mere naming of these houses will be an impressive list. Apart from Kalighat temple, the largest *atchala* temple in the city dedicated to presiding deity (though its original site was different from its present one), there are a few other temples consecrated to divinities like Kali, Siva, Vishnu and others. One of the oldest, viz. the famous nine-jewelled pagoda built in 1730 by the Black Zamindar, Govindram Mitra and engraved by the Daniells does not exist today in its original form, its memory is enshrined by a smaller temple which stands on the site of the original shrine. A temple dedicated to Rameswara Siva and founded by Nandaram Sen, who acted as Assistant to Ralph Sheldon, Receiver of Revenues in the early decades of the 18th century, still stands on the street bearing the name of its founder. Another Siva temple stands by the side of the Kali Temple on Bowbazar Street near its crossing with Chittaranjan Avenue.

According to a traditional account this Kali temple was founded by "one Srimanta Dom, of very low caste, who himself used to perform the duties of the priest to this goddess for a period of no less than 70 years upto the time of his death". We are further told that adjacent to the sanctuary of goddess Kali, there was an idol of Sitaladevi and that European residents used to make offering on recovery from small pox. This led the people to name the temple as the temple of *Feringhee Kali*. The Siddheswari temple of Baghbazar and the Anandamayee temple situated in Nimtolla Ghat Street, both dedicated to goddess Kali are also among the old Hindu temples of the city. The Siva temples in Kenderdine Lane, made of old-fashioned bricks and founded by Trilokram Pakrasi, Dewan of the Fort, are also among the oldest religious relics of Calcutta. The Siddheswari temple of Thanthania erected by San-karnath Ghosh, about 180 years back, contains an image of goddess Kali installed by a Brahmachari named Udayanarayana. At the back of the Anandamayee temple near Nimtolla Ghat stands the temple of Durgeswar Shiva, stated to have been built in 1794 by two sons of Madan Mohan Datta. The Sarvamangala temple on Chitpore Road seems to appear in an old Daniell print of the late 18th century. The Chitteswari temple according to one account was founded by Monohar alias Mahabir Ghosh, an employee of Raja Todarmal in 1610, and according to another, a robber chieftain named Chitto. Both these temples may claim to be placed in the list of Calcutta's oldest shrines. An old print by Charles D'Oyly (1835) gives a glimpse of the Chitteswari temple built in the style of a Navaratna. Another old temple in the city, lying south of Kalighat dedicated to Shyam Chand was caused to be erected in 1843 by Udaynarayan Mandal of Bawali. Adjacent to it may be seen a cluster of 12 smaller Shiva temples. In the vicinity of the same site there is a whole complex of Nava-ratna temple of Gopal, 2 Pancharatna and 10 at-chala temples of Shiva.

The two best specimens of ratna-type of temples are the Radhanath temple of Tollygunge in the south and the better-known temple of Dakshineswar in the north. Nearly all the temples associated with old Calcutta have disappeared in their original form and have undergone radical renovation.

According to David McCutcheon the Shiva temple at 2/5 Kebab Krishna Sur Street, Kumartuli, is “perhaps the oldest temple in Calcutta to have survived more or less in its original form.

It need not be supposed however that all the temples in Calcutta are made of bricks. There are also, though fewer in number, some stone-temples. Examples of such temples may be seen within the precincts of the Emerald Bower, Barrackpore Trunk Road, in central Calcutta by the side of the Railway Bridge at Manicktolla Main Road and the newly built marble shrine at Adyapith (1967). Calcutta also provides at least 2 examples of South Indian temple-architecture—the Vishnu temple at Kali Krishna Tagore Street with a five-storeyed *Gopuram* of the traditional Dravidian style and the modest temple dedicated to Salagram Vishnu, built by the Maharaja of Mysore on the bank of the Adi Ganga.

The old surviving temples in Calcutta, generally speaking, are not specimens of gorgeous ornamental architecture. But not so the Jain temples. The oldest Jain temple is located at 139 Cotton Street, Burrabazar, built in 1814. It is a flat-roofed double-storeyed building with a circular tower at the top and a facade embellished with excellent floral decorations. The other Jain temple, that of Pareshnath, located in Manicktolla, off Upper Circular Road, (renamed as Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy Road) is better known. Founded in 1867 by Rai Badridas Bahadur, Mookim and Court-Jeweller to the Government of India, it presents an ostentatious appearance, heightened by lavish decorations in enamel and mirrors. There is another temple also dedicated to Pareshnath to the north of Belgacchhia Road Bridge. It is made of reddish Chunar sandstone.

Compared to the Jain temples, the two shrines of the Buddhists are lacking in ostentation but not in elegance. The first temple, Dharmarajika Chaitya Vihar (1920) with a sandstone facade modelled on Ajanta architecture stands to the east of the College Square now renamed as Vidyasagar Udyan. The other temple, the Bauddha Saddharma Vihara, popularly known as the Japanese Buddhist temple and modelled on the Sanchi Stupas, is located a little to the south of the Dhakuria lake.

Among the Muhammedan places of worship the finest is perhaps the mosque in Dhurromtolla Street near the Chowringhee crossing. It was erected in 1842 by Ghulam Mohammad, the son of Tipu Sultan "in Gratitude to God and in Commemoration of the Honourable Court of Directors granting him the arrears of his stipends in 1840".

Eleven years later was erected in Colootolla Hafiz Hatim's mosque, a "lofty structure built in an attractive style". A third mosque which draws a large number of devotees is the two-storeyed shrine in Scaldah said to have been erected by Kutubuddin Sarkar. The mosque of Bhonsri Shah in Chitpur and the shrine of Pir Syed Husam-uddin Shah, popularly known as Manik Pir, near the junction of Upper Circular Road and Manicktolla Street are both fairly old. The largest and the most frequented mosque in the city is the Nakhoda Mosque of Chitpur erected in 1926. It is spacious enough to accommodate 10,000 devotees at a single session of prayer. It stands on the site of a smaller and older Nakhoda mosque.

The Gurudwaras of the Sikhs in Barrabazar and South Calcutta and the temples at Bagmari bear testimony to the importance of the Sikh residents in Calcutta dating back to its early days.

The cosmopolitan character of the city is attested by the presence of the Hebrew synagogue in Canning Street opened in 1884, the Parsee Tower of Silence (1822) situated in Belia-ghata, the Parsee Agiaree or Fire Temple at 26 Ezra Street, consecrated in 1839, the Greek Church in Amratollah Street erected in 1780, the Armenian Church of St. Nazareth (1724) on the street bearing the name of the community and enjoying the distinction of being the oldest surviving place of Christian worship in the city, and the Roman Catholic Cathedral at Portuguese Church Lane. They all alike point to the existence of various communities upholding different faiths as important elements in Calcutta's population from early days.

The Churches, Anglican and Presbyterian, are impressive specimens of Calcutta's architecture. The Mission Church founded in 1767 by Rev. John Zachariah Kiernander, the first Protestant Missionary in Bengal, St. John's (1787), St. Andrews whose foundation stone was laid in November 1815,

St. Thomas consecrated in 1833, Free Church (1848) and above all, St. Paul's Cathedral which took 8 years to be completed since the year of its foundation in 1839 are among the most splendid examples of church-architecture to be found anywhere in India. The number of the parishioners is now steadily on the decline and understandably enough, their maintenance poses problems to those responsible for it.

7

The First Capital Of The Last Empire

As we look back on the days long gone by, a series of capital cities of India-Girivraja, Pataliputra, Purushapura, Kanauj or Mahodaya-Sri flash before our eyes. In medieval ages the honour of a capital-city was shared among Agra, Fathpur Sikri and Delhi, its name varying from time to time. The British in their early days could not dare entertain the dream of an empire to be owned by them in India. They had come in quest of trade and for many years following their advent they remained content with their primary status as merchants. The Mughals were at the dazzling height of power when the East India Company's explorers set their foot on the Indian soil. The symptom of decline of the Mughals manifested themselves in the last years of Aurangzeb's reign. It became apparent to many that a contest for power was imminent. Naturally enough, the new aspirants were confined to the rank of the Indian powers. The English who had in the meantime out-distanced other rivals in the commercial world, were content to consolidate their power with its base firmly entrenched in India. Till the end of the 18th century the local leaders of the English Company thought it expedient to grab the substance of Bengal in preference to the shadow of Delhi. The advent of the next century opened out a new vision of empire-building since the Mysore Raj had gone into liquidation, the Marathas who had yielded their pride of place on the historic field of Panipat much earlier had split up into warring camps and the Sikhs were yet to make their power felt and feared. By 1818 the Company's paramountcy was extensively acknowledged. In course of the next four decades their power and prestige made enormous strides, mark-

ing the British as the one unrivalled power in the Indian sub-continent.

In 1858 the Company's rule was supplemented by that of the British Crown. But there was no change in the capital even after the transfer of power. The old merchant city continued to remain for the next 53 years the capital of the British Empire of India till the proclamation of Delhi as the new capital in 1911. Why were the British authorities averse to any change in the seat of power for over half a century? Imperial assemblages were no doubt held in Delhi in 1877 and again in 1911 in the midst of unprecedented pomp and grandeur. But what prevented the British from removing their capital from Calcutta to Delhi all these years?

Such a transfer would have carried with it a lot of symbolic value—the replacement of the old Mughal by the new British imperial authority. The reason of British reluctance to do the obvious thing is perhaps to be sought in this very situation. They did not perhaps relish the idea of being looked upon as the successors of the Grand Mughals. They much preferred that they should be regarded as the harbinger of a new order unconnected with the past. Hence their decision to reject the example of their immediate predecessors, the Mughals, who did not hesitate to cling to Delhi, the former capital of the Turco-Afghans whom they had supplanted. To the average Britisher the idea of being labelled as successor to the Mughal had little or no appeal, rather he had a sort of repugnance for it. His imperial pride led him to work on the idea that what was founded on the ruins of the old empire was a new order altogether; Pax-Britannia was a new concept and it sought to derive its justification in a new identity, all its own.

Apart from the psychological factor there was another consideration of great practical value. Calcutta was more than an administrative headquarter; it was the centre of the busiest trade and commerce in India. The British Empire was, in the main, the outcome of a venture in mercantilist capitalism and no city had a better and more logical claim to be treated as its capital than the port-city of Calcutta. The Empire, from the beginning, was meant to serve the economic interest of

Britain and this could be best safeguarded if the centre of their activities was located in the city and harbours of Calcutta. Delhi, or as a matter of fact, any other city would be a poor substitute. As was observed in the columns of a Calcutta Daily dated 8 December of 1911—"Has it occurred . . . to ask why Downing Street and St. Stephen's are in London rather than in York or Crew? A little reflection will show that the present location of the British Government is due to the simple fact that London is more important than any other town in the United Kingdom. This is precisely the reason why Calcutta has been and always will be the capital of India. It is the most important city in India, the only city where the Government are brought into contact with the great commercial interests and an enlightened public opinion. Delhi has neither commerce nor public opinion, and one might as well propose to make Allahabad the seat of Imperial Government".

But the events of 1905-06 precipitated by Curzon's ill-conceived decision to partition Bengal were destined to mark a turning point in more senses than one. It was regarded as a sinister move to combat and crush the rising spirit of nationalism which found in Bengal a congenial soil for growth. It unleashed the pent-up forces of nationalist solidarity and plunged the whole of Bengal, and parts of India, into the vortex of an intensive anti-British agitation, conducted on an unprecedented mass-scale. The saner section of the British authorities realised soon enough that the partition was a wrong move. King George V was advised to assuage Indian feeling on this score. A grand Durbar attended by the King and Queen of England and the Emperor and Empress of India announced in Delhi the revocation of the partition. The nationalists in Bengal felt jubilant that the settled fact of 1905 was unsettled in 1911. But they had some immediate surprises in store for them. From the same Durbar was sounded an Imperial Proclamation announcing the British Indian Government's decision to transfer the capital from Calcutta to Delhi. Bengal stood re-united as before no doubt but she was made to suffer loss of much of its prestige in the removal of the capital to Delhi, the erstwhile capital of the Mughals.

There was a second reason too. The ruling classes in

Britain were then convinced that the new order had struck enough roots to permit a resurrection of Delhi. The Government had already decided in favour of the pageantry of a Durbar for which the historic capital of the Grand Mughals was supposed to be the most proper venue. No less exalted personalities than the Royal couple were to preside over it. The scene was set in an atmosphere of unprecedented pomp and grandeur, Queen Mary wearing "a Crown with 4149 cut diamonds 2,000 rose diamonds, 22 emeralds, 4 rubies and 4 sapphires". It was from the Durbar that the King-Emperor proclaimed :

"We are pleased to announce to our people that we have decided upon the transfer of the seat of the Government of India".

The decision, arrived at earlier, was kept a closely guarded secret. On December 12, 1911 wrote the *Statesman* :

"The Government of India have certainly succeeded in giving a surprise to the people of India. Two days ago there was not possibly a dozen people in the whole of India who imagined that the transference of the capital of the Empire from Calcutta to Delhi was a matter of practical consideration".

And yet the decision was a deliberate one. It was a device designed to cover the humiliation of a retreat from the precipitate action of 1905 under the cloak of Imperial vanity seeking solace in the memories of a lost but grand empire.

European Calcutta, in particular, felt sore and grim. "Calcutta is done"—lamented many. The *Statesman* described the decision as an "insult to the people of Bengal" and as "a mischievous move". The European merchant community felt that all was lost and that "goods that now came to Calcutta will go to Bombay and Karachi". The general public in Calcutta and indeed throughout Bengal reacted to the decision with unqualified disapproval. Many even to this day are inclined to regard 1912 (the actual date of the transfer of the capital to Delhi) as the beginning of Calcutta's decline. No doubt there was an immediate fall in investment and speculation and it was not the inconsiderable few who felt worried about the future of the palatial buildings which used to accommodate the offices and residences of the higher-ups in the

bureaucracy. Correspondences appeared in newspapers under the generic headline of "Degradation of Calcutta".

Actual events, however, were soon to prove that the fear was exaggerated and Calcutta lived on. Its only loss was that henceforth it missed the proverbial grandeur connected with the Viceregal establishment even though the Emperor's representative was accustomed to spending substantial portions of the year in Simla. The loss, if at all, was largely compensated by the installation of a full gubernatorial seat in the provincial capital. Whatever misgivings the mercantile and the European investors might have felt at the shifting of the capital, were not shared by the average 'Native' Calcuttans. To them the decision to annul the partition was far more important than the removal of the capital. Future events proved that their views were far more correct than those of the panic-struck Europeans. Viewed from a distant point of time such as today, a discerning observer would regard the removal of the capital to Delhi as the first retreat of British Imperialism before the first organised onslaught of Indian nationalism. 1912 was thus the beginning of the process which culminated in the final retreat, enacted thirty-five years later.

The period from Charnock to Hardinge, i.e. 1690 to 1912 was a continuous link in the story of Calcutta. The choice of Calcutta as the capital of British India was not an accident. The determining factor was the commercial prospect held out by the port-town of Calcutta. Even after the transfer of the capital, the volume of trade did not diminish. Statistical survey shows that the aggregate value of the foreign sea-borne trade of Calcutta during the years 1891-92, 1892-93, 1893-94, 1894-95 and 1895-96, exclusive of governmental transactions, for articles of import only amounted to Rs. 28,65,72,342, Rs. 25,43,01,400, Rs. 30,78,45,342, Rs. 27,44,43,275 and Rs. 28,18,46,990 respectively. The value of exports for the years 1896-97, 1897-98, 1898-99, 1899-1900, 1900-1901 has been calculated at Rs. 4,496 lakhs, Rs. 4,532 lakhs, Rs. 4,674 lakhs, Rs. 4,998 lakhs, and Rs. 5,485 lakhs respectively. A comparison of these figures with the trade statistics at the dawn of the 18th century, writes the author of *A Short History of Calcutta* "will give a far better idea than words can convey,

of the stupendous strides with which the port of Calcutta has reached, in less than 200 years, its present position as an Emporium of Trade of the first magnitude in the beneficent, all-powerful and world-pervading protection of the Union Jack, inspite of the ceaseless breaks of a treacherous river". Even after the Union Jack was seen flying from the Viceroy's new lodge in Delhi, the enormous and rapidly increasing importance of Calcutta as a commercial centre, is illustrated by the fact that in the year ending 31 March, 1913 the aggregate figures amounted to not less than Rs. 15,706 lakhs of which Rs. 6,141 lakhs represent inputs from abroad and Rs. 9,565 lakhs as exports of Indian merchandise, the increase in inputs being returned at Rs. 940 lakhs and the expansion in exports at Rs. 978 lakhs.

Apart from its potentialities as a port-city, Calcutta owed it extraordinary position as the second city of the Empire and one among the first twelve in the world to its attainments in the field of education and culture, attainments which, in a large measure, were the outcome of early contact with the west. Calcutta, in many ways, proved to be the path-finder for the rest of the Indian towns. No city or region in India absorbed the impact of western contact at a faster pace than Calcutta. Unlike the ancient historic cities of India it was not fastened to any traditional mooring. The various elements which had made it the centre of their activities were linked together by the common urge of making a fortune in the new, growing environs of the port city. Their response to the demands of transition was sure and steady. The *tols* and *madrasahs*, the seats of traditional learning were there, as in other places of India. According to one estimate there were 28 *tols* in Calcutta in 1818. We are informed by Adam's report that the number of Persian schools in the city was 19. The *madrasahs* were open to the Hindus desirous of acquiring a knowledge of the Persian as well and in some cases their number exceeded that of the Muslims whose interests the *madrasahs* were primarily intended to serve. But *tols* and *madrasahs* failed to meet the needs of the hour. The authorities of the Company did not concern themselves with matters relating to education till the days of Warren Hastings. By then the foundation of British

rule had been well laid and the authorities became conscious of the need of creating a class of people who might help them in carrying on the routine work of administration. They thought it expedient to leave the old administrative laws and judicial practices of the Mughals undisturbed as far as possible. For this they needed a class of people conversant with oriental languages like Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit. This largely explains Hastings' patronage leading to the establishment of the Calcutta Madrasah in 1781, the special object of which was "to qualify the sons of muhammedan gentleman for responsible and lucrative offices in the state, even at that date largely monopolised by the Hindus". For several months the Governor-General himself bore all the expenses involved in its foundation and functioning. The Madrasah originally stood on a plot of land south of the Baithakhana Street. In Wood's Map (1784) it is shown as "Madrassah or Persian College". Later it was decided to shift the Madrasah to a new and spacious building whose foundations were laid on July 15, 1824. It stands today on Wellesley Street, re-christened as Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Street.

If the foundation of the Calcutta Madrasah was laid in 1781, the decision to establish a Sanskrit College in Calcutta was not taken till August, 1821. Two years later the Committee of Public Instruction was entrusted with steps for the establishment of the College. It commenced work on the New Year's Day 1824 in a rented house at 66 Bow Bazar Street. With its own building completed in College Square, the college started work on and from the 1st day of May 1826.

In the meantime, led by the desire mainly to acquaint the Company's civilians with the language of the people among whom they had come to work, Wellesley took the initiative in founding the Fort William College in 1800. Thus for half a century after Plassey the English authorities were concerned only with promoting oriental learning and languages for purely administrative reasons. The Asiatic Society was founded in 1784 at the instance of Europeans in their non-official capacity for the pursuit of knowledge and for researches into oriental literature, philosophy, history etc. The President of the Society in the year of its foundation, Sir William Jones,

defined its scope as "the geographical limits of Asia and within these limits its enquiries will be extended to whatever is performed by men and produced by nature". Calcutta may take legitimate pride in its foundation since it proved to be a landmark in the cultural history of India. It proved to be the most effective medium for bringing Indian and non-Indian scholars together and for expanding the bounds of human knowledge, placing it on a place which served the interests of scholars and not merely of clerks and interpreters. It is not a matter of small pride that Calcutta was the birth-place of what was the earliest seat of oriental learning in the whole of the Asian world.

While the Company deliberately refrained from promoting liberal education among the people its cause was upheld by two different agencies-missionary and private. The first denominational school set up in Calcutta was the Calcutta Free School founded in 1727 by public subscription for the purpose of educating poor European children in the Protestant religion. In 1800 it was amalgamated with the Charity School, founded, according to one version by Robert Bouchier, second in the Fort William Council, and according to another, as a result of the munificence of the Sikh merchant Omi Chand for "the support and education of the children of British subjects in indigent circumstances". A number of schools were later founded by several Christian missionary societies for educating boys and girls, irrespective of religion. Their success encouraged them to set up colleges even before the University of Calcutta was thought of. A number of these still survive.

Private schools were also sponsored by eminent citizens of Calcutta like Joynarain Ghosal, Jagamohan Basu, Baidyanath Roy, Guruprasad Basu, Radha Kanta Deb, Gourmohan Audhya, Motilal Seal, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and others. Eurasian residents in Calcutta also took the initiative in founding several schools in Calcutta which taught classical languages like Latin and Greek besides English. The best known among these were those associated with Archer, Griffith, Farell, Drummond and Sherbourne. A number of private girls' schools also flourished in which Mrs. Lawson, Mrs. Pitts and Mrs. Durrell taught and after whom the schools were named.

The most important single event in the history of education in 19th century Calcutta was the foundation of the Hindu College, also known under the names of Anglo-Indian College, Maha Pathsala, Native Hindu College and Calcutta Vidyalaya (January 1817). It was to the intense urge felt among the non-officials and pre-dominantly Hindu population of Calcutta that this premier institution owed its origin. With a fund of Rs. 1,13,179 raised as subscription, the school aiming at liberal education of "children of the members of the Hindoo community", was opened at a rented house in Chitpore from where it was later shifted to its present site in College Square. "It was", as Dr. Duff described it, "the very first English seminary in Bengal, or even in India as far as I know". The College marked the beginning of New Learning in its true sense. In 1855 the institution was taken over by the Government and its upper classes received the name of the Presidency College.

Private initiative again resulted in the establishment of the Calcutta School Book Society (1817) and the Calcutta School Society (1819) for promoting education among the native children through "diffusion of useful elementary knowledge and the establishment of native schools throughout the country".

Nor was female education neglected. A number of girls' schools were set up under the initiative of the Juvenile Society for the Support of Female Bengalee Schools, founded in 1819. The first girls' school founded by the Society was at Gouribari in Ultadanga. The Report of the Calcutta School Society for 1822 states that "the business commenced with a very interesting examination of about 40 poor Bengali girls, belonging to the Female Juvenile Society". We are informed by Raja Radhakanta Deb that "the proficiency in reading and spelling shown by girls educated by the Female Society gave great pleasure". The Raja also offered to the Society the manuscript of a pamphlet in Bengali on *Stri Siksha Vidhayak* on the subject of female education. The object of the manuscript was to show that female education was customary among the higher classes of the Hindus . . . and that female education, if encouraged, will be productive of the most beneficial effect. The efforts of Miss Cook who came from England and worked for the Ladies Society for Natives in the field of female education

in Calcutta and its vicinity in the twenties of the last century were also praiseworthy. The Central School founded in 1826 did pioneering work under her leadership in educating the females of Calcutta and of the districts. At the end of the year there were about 600 girl students reading in 30 different schools in Calcutta.

Eminent leaders of the Calcutta Society like Raja Radha Kanta Deb and Prusonna Coomar Tagore, however, felt that the instruction imparted in Christian missionary schools was not liberal enough and left much that was desirable. The Derozians like Rev. Krishnamohan Banerjee and Peary Chand Mitra had also their misgivings. Their exertions prepared the grounds for the establishment of the first public school for girls at a house in Baithakhana (Mirjapore) made available by the kind gift of the site by Dakhinaranjan Mukherjee in 1849. The school which started with 21 girls later moved to a new site in Cornwallis Street (now Bidhan Sarani) where its foundations were laid on 6 November, 1850. Originally named as the Hindu Family School, it received its name after Sir John Drinkwater Bethune, the Law Member in the Governor-General's Council, who took a leading role in its foundation. This was the first school attended by girls of respectable Hindu families whose response to missionary educational activities was at best hesitant.

Another school known as *Banga Mahila Vidyalaya* came into being in 1876 under the sponsorship of two outstanding social reformers Dwarkanath Ganguli and Ananda Mohan Bose. After 2 years of brief but glorious existence it merged itself in the older Bethune School. The success and popularity of Bethune School which opened up a College section in 1879 encouraged a few other girls' schools to be set up. The more prominent among these were the *Mahakali Pathshala* founded in 1893 by Mataji Tapaswini, a philanthropic lady of the Deccan, a school in Entally and another set up in Baghbazar by Sister Nivedita in 1898.

The establishment of the Calcutta Medical College in 1835 was yet another landmark in the history of education in Calcutta. Madhusudan Gupta, a student of the College showed rare courage in undertaking the anatomical dissection of a dead

body—a taboo to the orthodox Hindus. The event was celebrated with 39 gun shots from the Fort.

The University of Calcutta was founded in 1857. Its jurisdiction till 1903 was unbounded. Colleges and schools affiliated to it extended from Peshawar to Rangoon. In 1904 its territorial limits were restricted to Bengal (including Bihar and Orissa), Assam and Burma. By 1917 Bihar and Orissa were taken out of its jurisdiction, followed by the separation of Burma in 1920, East Bengal in 1947 and Assam in 1948. Even then the Calcutta University has today the largest number of students in its roll—an unmistakable testimony to the hunger for knowledge without holding any prospect of employment which education may reasonably be expected to promote.

Commensurate with the spread of education there was the growth of public opinion represented through press and journals published from Calcutta and Serampore. The first newspaper published in Calcutta was the *Bengal Gazette*, more popularly known after its founder James Augustus Hicky as *Hicky's Gazette* (January 29, 1780). It was published as "a weekly political and commercial paper, open to all parties but influenced by none". The pioneer of the Indian press was not, however, permitted to run the journal beyond two brief years since he had incurred the displeasure of no less an exalted person than the Governor-General, Warren Hastings, for what was labelled as vulgar and scurrillous attacks on the head of the Company's Affairs in India.

The next venture in Calcutta's journalism was the *Calcutta Gazette and the Oriental Advertiser* published on 4 March 1784 as a weekly newspaper. It was re-christened first as the *Calcutta Gazette*, then as the *Government Gazette*, and finally again reverting to the original name in 1832. It published both official and non-official information till it assumed its official form in 1832. Other journals like the *Bengal Hurkaru*, *The Calcutta Courier*, *The Calcutta Chronicle*, *The Calcutta Monthly Journal* followed in quick succession. Most of them were mainly concerned with matters official and about the Europeans in India; but there were a few whose editors, though Englishmen like William Duane of the *India World* (1794), James Silk Buckingham of the *Calcutta Journal* and Arnot of the same

journal were deported by order of the Government, whose wrath they had incurred by their outspoken public disapprobation of some actions of the Government.

The spread of liberal education through the medium of schools, literary meetings and printed books sparked on the diffusion of enlightenment. This was reflected in papers owned or managed by the Indians. From the second decades of the 19th century Calcutta was flooded with Bengali (a few bi-lingual, Bengali and English) newspapers and journals. The first weekly newspaper to be published from Calcutta was *Bengal Gazette*, its first number appearing in May 1818 under the editorship of Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya. The editor in the first issue expressed the hope that since "no publication of the nature having hitherto been before the public, the community in general will encourage and support his exertion in the attempt he had made, and afford him a small share of their patronage". Then followed the *Brahmanical Magazine* or *Brahmansebadhi*—a bi-lingual journal under the sponsorship of Ram Mohun Roy (1821), *Sambad Cowmoodee* started by Bhabani Charan Bandopadhyay in 1821, *Mirat-ut-Akhbar* in Persian with Ram Mohun as its promoter (1822), *Samachar Chandrika* (1822) also under the editorship of Bhabani Charan, *Bangadut* in 1829, *Sambad Pravakar* (1831) with Iswar Chandra Gupta as editor, *Jnananveshan* (1831) edited by Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee, *Sambad-Bhaskar* (1839), *Tattvabodhini Patrika* (1843) *Satyarnab* (1850), *Masik Patrika* (1854), *Vidyotsahini Patrika* (1855) and the *Education Gazette* and *Saptahik Bartabaha* (1856). These papers dating to pre-Mutiny days did much to rouse public conscience against administrative lapses and acts of social injustice and helped new ideas to form wings.

Journalism in English patronised by influential Bengali leaders like Prasanna Coomar Tagore, Krishna Mohan Banerjee, Kashiprosad Ghosh, Giris Chandra Ghosh, Harish Chandra Mukherji and Krishnadas Pal, among others, led to the publication of the *Reformer* (1831), *The Enquirer* (1831) the *Hindu Intelligencer* (1846) and the *Hindoo Patrika* (1853). In post-1870 years appeared *Reis and Rayyet* in 1882 and the *Indian Nation* in 1883.

The earliest and the foremost among the post-Mutiny

Bengali newspapers was *Somprokash* first published on 15 November, 1858 with Dwarkanath Vidyabhushan as Editor. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* which survives till today as one of the most popular and influential among the English dailies of the country was started by Sisir Kumar Ghosh as a weekly paper from Jessore on 20 February, 1868. From Jessore it shifted to Calcutta in 1871. On the passing of the Vernacular Press Act in 1878, meant to stifle public opinion expressed through vernacular newspapers, the Patrika became an English Weekly so as to avoid the gagging Press Act. The two most important literary magazines, *Bangadarshan* and *Bharati* made their appearance in 1872 and 1877 respectively. Among the papers started in the last quarter of the 19th century *Sulava Samachar* (1870), *Bangabasi* (1881), *Sanjibani* (1883), *Hitabadi* (1891), and *Basumati* (1896) deserve special mention as protagonists of the cult of Indian nationalism.

Among the leading dailies in present-day Calcutta with the exception of *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and *Basumati*, mentioned above, the most prominent are the *Statesman* "incorporating and directly descended from the Friend of India founded 1818", *Ananda Bazar Patrika* founded in 1922 and the *Jugantar* established in 1937. Dailies in Hindi and Urdu are also published from Calcutta. Organised attempts on the part of the ruling authorities at throttling the freedom of press have been made from time to time and the hands of repression have come too heavily on the Calcutta (and Indian as well) newspapers, but the Calcutta press and also the press in India have survived these onslaughts and they continue to promote the formulation of enlightened public opinion in the country in a very effective manner. Its contribution has indeed gone a long way in shaping the mental make-up of the city which is distinctly its own.

Linked up with movement towards enlightenment promoted by the spurt of education and public opinion was the establishment of numerous associations and academies—some political, some philanthropic and others academic—which sprang into existence in Calcutta from the early years of the 19th century. The pioneer among the societies was the *Atmiya Sabha* founded by Ram Mohun in 1815 with the main hope of discussing

theological subjects. It was the precursor of the better remembered *Brahma Samaj* whose foundation was laid in January 1830. 1837 saw the foundation of the *Zamindary Association* later renamed as the *Landholders' Society*. Other associations generally sponsored by the affluent and enlightened section of the people, followed in succession—*The Bengal British India Society* in 1843, the *British Indian Association* in 1851, the outcome of the amalgamation of the Landholders' Society and the Bengal British India Society, the *National Association of* 1851, the *Indian League of* 1875 and the *Indian Association of* 1876. The history of the activities of these organisations is well-known. What is relevant for our purpose is to note that they mark out Calcutta as the birth-place of the growing political and social consciousness of the Indian people.

No less important are the Voluntary Associations which were primarily interested in social amelioration rather than in any particular political programme. A classified list of Voluntary Associations in Calcutta and suburbs from 1815 to 1876 as given in an appendix to a recent book—*Voluntary Associations and the Public Life in Urban Bengal*—by Dr. Rajat Sanyal makes an impressive reading. It includes 3 Associations for promoting general education, 3 for technical education, 17 learned and literary Societies for conducting discussion in Bengali or mainly in Bengali, 28 learned and literary Associations for conducting discussion in English or mainly in English, 4 learned Societies with special interests like agriculture, phrenology, social sciences etc., 1 learned Society for the Muslims for discussion in English, Arabic, Persian and Urdu, 4 public libraries, 22 Associations for religious reform, 6 Associations for social reform, 10 Association for protecting occupational and sectional interests, 3 Associations for promotion of national feeling, 2 Associations for moral reform. The names of the Associations alone indicate the varied interests taken by the enlightened citizens of Calcutta, Indian and non-Indian, in varying subjects ranging between Phrenology and Temperance, Horticulture and Theism, Gymnasium and Race, Mechanics and Photography and improvement of condition of workmen and women and of graduates and Railway passengers.

When one takes note of the large canvas of activities on which Calcutta made its influence felt—in various spheres—social, literary, cultural, intellectual, political and otherwise, one would not hesitate to regard the city as India's nerve centre. Without minimising the importance of the so-called Bengal Renaissance and the awakening of India that largely resulted from it, one would perhaps risk an error in supposing that the remarkable attainments in Calcutta in the 19th century were the achievements of any particular section of the city's population. True, the Bengalees constituted the major section of Calcutta's population. True also, that 19th century Calcutta produced outstanding leaders who left the impression of their brilliance indelibly written on the attainments of the age. Any nation of the world would be proud of the eminences from Rammohun to Rabindranath. But Calcutta which was the main sphere of their activities was not and is not the city of any particular sect or community of people. It is not possible to deny the claim that from the moment of its advent the settlement attracted a large number of people from outside the Subah to which it belonged and even from beyond. As years went by, the number and variety of its people increased by leaps and bounds and it developed as a full-fledged cosmopolitan city. The achievements of the 19th century Calcutta, apart from what the ruling power had done, in the spheres of cultural and intellectual activities, were inherent as much in the emergence of a galaxy of eminent leaders as in the composition of the city's population exposed to the impact of diverse cultural heritages, old and new, traditionalist and modern, eastern and western.

The British authorities felt proud of what they had done for the second city of the Empire. A great protagonist of the imperial cult, Lord Curzon recalled to a Calcutta audience in 1903 the achievements of British Calcutta as follows :

“To me, Calcutta is the capital, not merely of a province, great as that province is, but of the Indian Empire. As such, it appears to me firstly to symbolize the work that the English have done, and are doing in the country. For though, of the enormous population of over 1,100,000 souls that make up the city on both banks of the river, not much more than 30,000

are returned as Europeans and Eurasians, yet a glance of the buildings of the town, at the river and the roar and the smoke, is sufficient to show that Calcutta is in reality a European city set down upon Asiatic soil, and that it is a monument—in my opinion, one of the most striking extant monuments, for it is the second city to London in the entire British Empire—to the energy and achievements of our race”.

These sentiments indulged in a mood of exalting complacency represent only one side of the picture. Curzon did not or could not comprehend the problems already generated or to foresee the enormity of its nature with which the second city in the Empire was likely to be overwhelmed in the near future. The problems have no doubt been largely aggravated by extraneous factors like partition and following it the endless stream of migration from what was once known as East Bengal. But this is by no means an adequate or correct explanation. Much of the present day sufferings of the city are due to deficient planning, failure to anticipate and lack of constructive imagination on the part of those who held the destinies of the city in their hands for over 200 years. The ‘petrifying Juggle’ on which Geoffrey Moorhouse devoted a whole chapter in his book on Calcutta is largely the outcome of the failure of the British masters to imagine, anticipate and plan.

8

The Epilogue

No city in India has won more diverse and often conflicting epithets as Calcutta. The Directorate of Tourism, Government of West Bengal, introduces the city in these inviting words :

“Fascinating, Bewitching, Bewildering. That’s Calcutta, the capital of West Bengal and India’s largest city, a seething mass of activity with a cosmopolitan atmosphere, a far cry from Job Charnock’s Calcutta of 1690 to which the metropolis traces its origin”.

These words would have put to shame Clive of Plassey fame (?) in whose assessment Calcutta was “the most wicked place in the universe”. The town struck Mrs. Jemima Kindersley (1768) as “as awkward a place as can be conceived”. Sir George Trevelyan writing a century after Clive, described it as “an uninviting spot . . . (it) unites every condition of a perfectly unhealthy situation”. Rudyard Kipling was appalled by the ‘City of Dreadful nights’. While Calcutta reminded Bishop Reginald Heber of Moscow, Winston Churchill, reprimanded by Curzon at the Government House for his “diarrhoea of talk”, saw in ‘the grey fog and cold wind’ of Calcutta striking similarities with those in London. An Englishman, the author of a small book on Calcutta, writing in 1922 described the city as “magnificent and beastly”. “Terrible, beautiful city” wrote another. Dom Moraes described it as ‘the Spider city’. To the artist—author of *Calcutta—An Artist’s Impression* the city appeared always “interesting and much loved” even though abuses were hurled at it. A group of visiting British urban experts expressed their horror for “they had not seen human degradation on a comparable scale in any other city in the world.” Geoffrey Moorhouse considered it “both a monstrous and a marvellous city”.

Opinions expressed in Indian circles in recent times are no less outspoken and even frankly brutal. To the sensitive mind of Jawaharlal Nehru, Calcutta was but 'a city of processions'. "A monstrous, teeming, bewildering city"—so observed Satyajit Ray. Jawaharlal's was a fleeting impression suggested by a sense of overwhelming frustration and a mood of loud protest against anomalies felt by a sizeable section of the Calcuttans. Like several other cities Calcutta has two faces and one is likely to stumble into errors if one does not care to see both. Buddhadev Bose saw the real but little appreciated vision of the city when he wrote as far back as 1932 :

"In the last few years what an extraordinary spread of Calcutta and at what speed ! Calcutta will grow. It is still the capital because it is the seat of commerce. Today the merchants are kings. Calcutta is marvellous for its pomp and dust, for its discharge of filth and array of lights, for its sickness, ennui, craze, wanton gaiety and promiscuousness. All this is a rapid stream of life without a break.

"Our Rabindranath never looked upon Calcutta with love in his eyes which whenever I recall, gives me pain. Among the new Bengali writers a few have cast their eyes back on Calcutta. I am one of them. I love this city. I love Calcutta not as one loves one's mother but one's mistress. Calcutta is like a young woman who does not give in easily. First she turns away her face and keeps to herself the secret of her heart. To get her is a matter of earnest endeavour. But once she gives in, her femininity knows no limit and she has no comparison. The poor enchanted will then breathe a sigh and say to himself 'I have nowhere else to set my mind—I am eternally yours' ". The poet-essayist goes on :

"Calcutta is awaiting its poet still—a poet who will bring out the complete beauty of the city. The beauty wrapped in mystery and romance. Calcutta is complex, tossed in self-contradiction and dazzling in beauty. The city appears to be eternally lonely and manifests itself every day in its lonesome character. In the evening when one stands on the Chowringhee crossing and watches lights being lit one after another, the traffic in its noise, the uninterrupted stream of people, the city tearing itself to pieces in the mad rush, the stars up above in

the coppery sky gazing quietly in twos or threes—one is dead and dull if one's heart does not throb in ecstasy and excitement. Then on a summer noon when one walks in the foamy current which is the moving multitude of Clive Street, one has to have a tingling sensation sometime or other unless one is dead in feelings. Where is the poet to describe the smell of Calcutta streets—a mixture of coaltar, petrol and human sweat? Again on a rain-washed evening when the atmosphere is crystal clear and resplendent with lights; or on the gloomy morning with several patches of cloud and tramcars running with head-light on; or in the early hours before dawn which spread splendid illusion of quietude; or in the dark nights on the Ganga with its dark waters seen through the bizarre silhouette of the ships with the mysterious sounds around and the smell of the far away sea—will none see, hear and smell them and paint them in words followed by more splendid words, so that the posterity belonging to a more majestic metropolis would read them to take a long breath and say—'What a beauty was Calcutta, in olden days'."

Calcutta today retains its old cosmopolitan complex. To the Bengalis who were either original settlers or were early migrants from the hinterland were added the fortune-seekers not only from different parts of India but also from countries beyond. Among the non-Indian immigrants dating back to the days of Charnock and Clive was a good sprinkling of Europeans—British, Portuguese, Dutch, Dane, French, Greek, besides Armenians, Abyssinians, Persians, Jews and Chinese. Changes in the fortunes of trade, as well as in the pattern of politics, over the years, have led to a decline in the number of the Westerners resident in Calcutta of today, though the relics of their past are traceable, strewn all over the city. The Asian world, however, not only survives but also lends colour and vitality to the present day city-life. It would be hard to name any region of India whose people do not form an element in Calcutta's population.

In a recent analysis on *Calcutta—A Social Survey* (1968) Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose has taken pains to depict the social composition of the city. The predominant section is composed of the Bengali Hindus. The main caste-groups in

which they are divided are those of the Brahmans, Vaidyas and Kayasthas, the Suvarnabaniks and the Gandhabaniks. While the upper classes have shifted their main interest from traditional occupation like zamindari to professions like those of Medicine, Law, Engineering, Science, besides service, the latter, namely, the Suvarnabaniks and Gandhabaniks are found to have more tenaciously clung to traditional callings through a minimal amount of adjustment and change. The Bengali Muslims are today a smaller unit than it was before 1947—a large section having opted for Pakistan. The Calcutta Muslims, as a whole, consisting of both Bengali and non-Bengali elements are, however, a composite body—the aristocrats claiming connection with the imperial house of Delhi and the royal houses of Oudh and Mysore, the commercial classes hailing from Delhi, U.P. and Punjab, the Hindustani/Urdu-speaking small businessmen, labourers, artisans and Bengali-speaking Muslims consisting mostly of tailors, shop-keepers and pedlars.

In addition to the Bengali section of Calcutta's population there are considerable numbers belonging to several Indian communities. Prominent among them are the Rajasthanis, the Gujratis, the Punjabis, the Sindhis and the South Indians. The Rajasthanis, popularly known as the Marwaris, did not appear on the Calcutta scene, on a large scale, in the days before the First World War. It was only in the years following the war of 1914-18 that there took place a large-scale exodus from Rajasthan. For many years they derived their wealth from trade and investment in land. Today they are the principal successors of the old European firms in consequence of which the old and traditional type of their business has yielded place to British models. The Gujratis began their advent as traders in textiles, timber and tobacco. Later they added business in coal and shipping. They are also the owners of a large number of firms manufacturing chemical and pharmaceutical products. The Punjabis, entrenched mostly in South Calcutta, sharing it with the Gujratis, excel in supply and organisation of labour, machineries, tools and transport. The Sindhis have their main activities centred around business in jewellery and textiles. Unlike these communities, the South Indians coming from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka are

not permanent residents in the city (in South Calcutta barring Bhowanipur almost every third house is tenanted by a South Indian) in purely professional capacity.

These communities constitute an important and impressive feature of Calcutta's life and culture which would have remained less vigorous and rich but for their participation. But this has also resulted in what has been described as 'cultural pluralism.' The communities have not only maintained, as could only be expected, their linguistic identities, but have also set up distinctive residential concentrations of their own in selected areas of the city. Apart from the fact that Indian industry was denied a chance of free expansion under the shadow of British interests, no steps were taken either to restrict large-scale migration or to keep pace with the growing and inevitable demand of employment commensurate with unrestricted flow of migration. As Professor Bose comments :

"A caste-like segregation in residences as well as preference for occupations (thus) persists in Calcutta even when the city has thrown up many new occupations of various kinds having no relationship with traditional, hereditary occupations. This separateness of communities is further augmented by some features in their ways of living, dress, religion as well . . .

The point is that this superstructure of cultural pluralism has persisted in the civic community of Calcutta, and has perhaps helped indirectly in maintaining commercial differences. Whether this is good or bad is not the question. But the fact remains that a separateness fostered by restricted economic opportunities has thus been re-inforced by a feature of Hindu civilisation, which, in itself, is commendable."

Physically viewed, Calcutta is primarily a city of striking contrasts—posh areas with rows of splendid buildings, spacious roads and glittering lights co-existing with hovels and bustees with little or no sanitation, and minimal amenities of living from which God's air and light are banned and life is one of unrelieved distress and hardship. The people are divided into sharply contrasting groups—affluent classes living in palatial buildings, struggling middle classes doing their best to cling

* *Calcutta—A Social Survey*—Pp 84-85.

to traditional ways of their ancestors, the impoverished scions of old zamindar families who find little comfort in recalling the grand old living style of their forebears two generations ago and the rabble composed of rootless immigrants from neighbourly states and from beyond, eager to snatch any opportunity to satisfy their hunger for food and not so bothered about shelter—the increasing tribe of pavement-dwellers. One need hardly be surprised if in the not-too-distant future, statistics would reveal that their numbers would compete with those of the house-dwellers. The bottomless lower depths of Calcutta are staggering enough. How can human beings live like this—ask many. Few, if any at all, can come out with an answer in the form of a reasonable speculation.

In a large measure the intolerable situation is an inheritance from two major failures on our part. For many years the municipal authorities took no steps to undertake urgent reforms and expansion of the system of sewerage, drainage, conservancy and water supply. For another, the makers of our destiny—the powers that be—failed to anticipate the extent to which lack of anticipation and strategy of politics could work havoc. The aftermath of partition in the wake of Independence proved to be a major disaster for Bengal in general and for Calcutta in particular. The exodus explosion caused the population in the Calcutta Metropolitan District to shoot up to 9.5 millions (1981 provisional estimate). Net addition in the last ten years has been estimated as 1.6 millions indicating a decennial growth of 24% during 1961-71. The evacuees from erstwhile East Pakistan were largely shifted to other places but a good size rehabilitated themselves in and around the city. Within the Metropolitan area there are 260 refugee colonies covering a total population of over 400,000 in about 10 clusters of refugee colonies. To the number of refugees from East Pakistan were added to migrants from other states, specially from the States of Bihar, U.P. and Orissa and the districts of 24 Parganas and Howrah. A rough survey gives the number of pavement dwelling population as 200,000 in the metropolis. 28% of them are migrants from neighbourly states, 50% from the districts of West Bengal and 22% from other places of origin. 2.5 million people constituting nearly one-fourth of the total popu-

lation live in bustees or slums. Joseph Lelyveld cannot be accused of exaggeration when he writes :

“The bustee areas, which boast of what may well be the worst urban density statistics known anywhere become (once the monsoon blows off the Bay of Bengal) hopeless swamps. Usually the narrow lanes in a Calcutta bustee are half given over to open drains where mouldering contents are then carried past every door-step, a bustee lane in the monsoon season can make the River Styx look like a crystal mountain stream. In the grimmest of these hovels, a fully grown man can neither stand nor lie at the full length but families of five or six can be commonly found jammed together on the damp earth floors. Only in the best bustees are there solid walls between one of these domiciles or pens or stalls, whatever you choose to call them and the next. Normally there are just a few boards, a strip of corrugated iron on a curtain fashioned from old gunny sack. Having seen such bustees, you discard the snap judgment that the pavement-dwellers must be worst-off people in the world”.

Traffic and transport are a daily ordeal in Calcutta. An overcrowded bus or a tram moving at snail's pace along the city's streets is an anachronism. The Calcuttans have literally mastered the art of living dangerously, for living depends on movements to and from places of work. The risk to which a commuter exposes himself is the curse of an unplanned city which grew at random. While land space for roads in cities of developing countries average between 25 to 30%, the space available for roads in Calcutta is not more than 6.5% of the total land area. What aggravates the basically defective system—an inheritance of negligence from the early days of the settlement—is the free movements allowed to all sorts of vehicles—hand carts, rickshaws, trucks, bullock or buffalo carts. Apart from resultant slow pace there remains the unsolved problem arising out of the fact that the surface traffic is capable of carrying nearly 2.8 million passengers every day against the demand of over 6.8 million. The outcome is catastrophic.

The garbage removal constitutes yet another serious problem. Heaps of stinking wastes at intervals along the main thoroughfare are commonplace sights and the agencies for their

disposal fail to cope with the problem. The hoardings 'Keep the city clean' are a mockery and the city continues to smell.

Another critical area of Calcutta's growing problems during the last few years is the severe shortage of power in the city. In West Bengal and in Calcutta in particular, the crisis has been so severe that the plan to schedule the hours of load shedding failed to function smoothly. While a number of reasons may be located for the debacle in the power front, the major reasons appear to be lying in the non-utilisation of the existing capacity for power. Why does Calcutta have load-shedding? It occurs because the three agencies which supply power to the city—CESC, WBSEB, and DVC—together cannot supply the city's restricted demand of 530 mw in the morning peak hour (11 A.M.) and 590-600 mw in the evening peak hour (7 P.M.). In 1982, the average shortfall in power was 111.34 mw. Despite the recent addition of 270 mw of installed capacity (210 mw at Bandel Unit V and 60 mw at Titagarh) to the grid supplying Calcutta there has been only a marginal increase in the total availability of power in the city. The problem of load-shedding will therefore continue to torment the people of Calcutta for quite some time. The previous government and the Centre were responsible for the lack of augmentation in the installed capacity especially between 1965 and 1973. The Left Front Government is responsible for neglecting the growing power crisis, which actually set in 1972, till it found its support withering in the cities in the 1982 elections. The citizens are therefore eager to witness whether the newly constituted board of the SEB can achieve its first target—bringing Kolaghat (with a total capacity of 630 mw) into stream by February-March 1984. We hope it is not too long a wait.

The supply of filtered water per capita in Calcutta of today is grossly inadequate. Drainage continues to pose a great problem. This is attributed to "haphazard urban expansion especially along the eastern and southern fringes of the city, blocking outfall channels and effecting what little natural drainage is available". In the monsoon season after a 2 to 3 hour downpour the streets are literally turned into canals. The stagnant waters in low-lying areas show little or no sign of receding for days and create serious health hazards. The exist-

ing sewers and conduits cope with only 1/3 of the city. The pipe lines are old, a number of them dating back to 1906 suited to meet the needs of an area which covers a little over 1/3 of the total area of the city today and of a population which has increased from 1 million in 1906 to 9.5 million now. The problem has been accentuated by the slope of the city away from the river which again is silting up at an alarming rate.

The picture, dismal enough, takes on the character of gruesome tragedy. A recent survey reveals that out of about 9.5 million population in the Calcutta Metropolitan District, about 4 million live at or below the poverty line with monthly household income of less than Rs. 300/-.

Calcutta is one of the world's most over-crowded cities. The city proper (not the Metropolitan District) contains 102,010 people per square mile, the nearest Indian rival being Ahmedabad with 56,540 people per square mile. A recent survey reveals that

“About two-thirds of the people within the city of Calcutta live in ‘Kutchra’ (non-permanent) buildings and more than 57 percent of multi-member families have only one room to live in. For more than half of the families cramped into one room quarters, there are only 30 square feet or less per family member. One third of the people in the city (one million out of 3.1 million) live in bustees or slums.”

The rate of construction of residential houses falls far short of the actual need. Rough calculation shows that if the slum and bustee dwellers were to be properly housed, some 12,000 dwellings would have to be built per year over a period of 30 years—a task which remains beyond the sphere of practicability. Even then if this Herculean task is accomplished, there remains the problem of lack of space for parks and playgrounds. The existing areas of parks and playgrounds in present day Calcutta is about 1200 acres which falls short of the international standard of 13,500 acres.

The problems are acute enough and indeed they constitute a serious challenge. Attempts are not, however, lacking in setting things to order. The need for metropolitan planning and development in Calcutta was felt for a long time especially

after the attainment of independence and the almost endless stream of migration from erstwhile East Pakistan. It was at the instance of Dr. B. C. Roy, the most dynamic and visionary among the Chief Ministers of West Bengal, that with the active support of the World Health Organisation and Ford Foundation that the Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organisation was set up in 1961. It prepared in 1966 a Master Plan of remedial measures to ensure to the city better water supply, sewerage, traffic and transportation. It was not till four years later that a new body known as the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority came into being in 1970. It was empowered to execute major plans as laid down in the CMPO Master Plan. Its jurisdiction extends over two corporations of Calcutta and Chandernagore besides 34 municipalities in West Bengal. Its responsibilities as defined in the Act and amended in 1977 are as follows :

- (i) the formulation of development plans for the Calcutta Metropolitan Area ;
- (ii) the coordination and execution of the plans ;
- (iii) the supervision and execution of the projects and
- (iv) the financing and execution of the projects.

In 1974 by a further amendment of the Act the Howrah Improvement Trust and the Calcutta Metropolitan Water Authority were brought under the CMDA. The work of the CMDA thus enlarged is primarily concerned with 4 major sectors, Water supply ; Sewerage and Drainage ; Traffic and Transportation ; Area Development and Bustee Improvement. The amount of work done so far by the Authority is by no standard inconsiderable. Within the city proper the supply of water has risen from 80 million to 140 million gallons per day. One-half of the city stands covered by sewerage today in place of one-third formerly served, though water logging continues to be a problem. The road traffic and transportation have been to some extent improved in consequence of the widening of 20 major roads and construction of 4 bridges, 2 fly-overs and 1 pedestrian subway at Howrah Station area. About 1.6 million slum population out of a total of 2.5 million in the Metropoli-

tan District have been covered under Slum Improvement Scheme by providing the slums with drinking water, paved roads, drains, sanitary latrines and electricity.

The Metropolitan Traffic Project is engaged in building a network of underground railways as a means of easing the traffic problem. When completed, Calcutta will earn the distinction of being the first city in India to possess underground railways.

Even then the work done so far touches only the fringe of the problem which emanates from the basic fact that the civil machineries are antiquated, inadequate and ill-equipped to meet the needs of an ever growing population. Any scheme or schemes for the increase in the number and variety of transports can only ease the situation in part without solving it. The most essential need is the adoption of a co-ordinated project aimed at diffusion of the city population through construction of satellite towns accommodating offices and residences and a proclamation of some areas in the city as '*conservation areas*' in which congestion or addition to existing buildings would be under a total ban. It is also necessary to enquire into the reasons which helped the population in Calcutta to grow unchecked and unplanned over the years. Even though the city ceased to be the capital of India nearly 70 years ago and the commercial importance of Calcutta as a port-city seems to be on the decline, there is hardly any reason for feeling unduly exercised about either the city's present or its future. The vigour and vitality of its people remain unaffected by the lack of amenities and notwithstanding the pressure of adverse and incalculable circumstances over which it had little or no control.

The lack of amenities in terms of municipal commitments, however deplorable, in Calcutta of today need not be underscored unduly. Such deficiencies existed from the early days of the settlement so far as the major sector of the town, inhabited by the Indians or 'the Natives' was concerned. But this did not prevent the growth of the city in terms of physical, political and commercial importance. The poet Iswar Chandra Gupta writing more than a century ago did not intend any compliment to the city when he wrote :

“Mosquitoes at night, flies in day time
Surrounded by them we live in Calcutta”.

If Calcutta survived and even prospered over the years, why should one think of Calcutta as a dying, if not, a dead city? The life of a city is perhaps derived more from the character of its people than from its environs. No one would deny that there is a plethora of problems—some of these challenging and bewildering by nature—poverty, human degradation, pavement and bustec-dwellers, unemployed, angry youth, pestering beggars and so on. But was Calcutta ever free from them? To ask this question is not to justify their existence but to emphasise that, inspite of them, Calcutta continued to and still does attract people from other states. This is because Calcutta can claim to have a personality and character of its own. This stands revealed through its attainments in various fields of activities—artistic, literary, intellectual, philanthropic and political. No city in India organises more exhibitions on art and culture than Calcutta. Films produced in Calcutta's studios are known to have earned international awards. The city easily tops the list of artists and men of letters to be found in one single city. It enjoys the first place in holding the best-attended book fairs. Its fairs, muktangans, held on streets or parks under the open sky speak for themselves. Few cities in India, if any, can claim to possess more academies and voluntary associations than Calcutta. It would be a baffling task to name any city in India in which larger and more active institutions of charity and voluntary social welfare organisations can be found than in Calcutta. Calcutta's love for sports, games, especially cricket and football, music and fine arts remains unbeaten. Foreign participants in international games have found the Calcutta spectators as the world's most appreciative ones. Politically speaking, Calcutta is universally acknowledged as one of the most sensitive cities in the world. No event of some political importance occurring in any part of the contemporary world fails to evoke its immediate and perhaps the earliest response in Calcutta. Emotionally, an average Calcuttan looks upon himself as not merely a part of the city in which he lives but owns kinship with suffering sectors of mankind all over the world.

An American social scientist is known to have observed that while most of the cities in the world are impersonal, Calcutta had a distinct personality which is bound to spell a cast on any one who may have lived in it for sometime and got to know it intimately enough. If one has read the stages in the growth of the city and its people one would realise that Calcutta has learnt to take every misfortune in its stride and outlive them—poverty, turmoil, famine, squalor and confusion. Many, on a superficial view, would perhaps be inclined to find the city uncongenial and even repulsive in many ways; but there are others who will not hesitate to like it and even discover in it potentialities of important leadership.

Geoffrey Moorhouse in the chapter under the caption of Zindabad visualises that unless the poverty of Calcutta which he describes as “an affront to the dignity of mankind and a mocking tell-tale against the achievement of natives” is liquidated, either of two things may happen—a plague on a medieval scale or violent sporadic risings of the poor against the rich. But these appear to be rather remote possibilities, or hardly possibilities at all, in the context of the character and history of the city. It has survived many crises and there is every possibility that it would survive in future. Can India survive Calcutta is a more pertinent question, as Lelyveld has raised, and also answered it. India cannot afford Calcutta to go the way that Moorhouse is constrained to comprehend. The signs of tumult and turmoil are no doubt there. The stress and strain of living is almost unbearable; poverty and distress are writ large on the face of the city. Moorhouse’s prophecy recalls the classic report which Heinrich Heine wrote from Paris in 1842:

“Everything is as quiet as a winter’s night after a new fall of snow. But in the silence you hear continually dripping, dripping the profits of the capitalist, as they steadily increase. You can actually hear them piling up—the riches of the rich. Sometimes there is the smothered sob of poverty, and often, too a scraping sound, like a knife being sharpened”.

There was more in Heine’s report, of writings that smell of blood, of songs with demonic note which seemed to have been composed in Hell, of enormous workshops ‘where the metals

are worked and where the half-naked defiant figures keep time to their songs with the mighty blow which the great hammers stroke upon the ringing anvil'

"Sooner or later the harvest which will come from this sowing in France threatens to be a republican outbreak". But Calcutta in the 80s, inspite of its prevailing turmoil, inequalities and distress was not that explosive or provoking as Paris in the 40s of the last century. True, when Moorhouse visited the city in 1969 and 1970 it was passing through a phase of violent unrest, erratic murders and acts of terrorism. But the excesses subsided with the suddenness with which these had erupted. Soon enough Calcutta found its moorings, seeking redress through Parliamentary and organisational channels. The people opted in favour of battle by the ballots. The party at the helm of government, now, as before, chooses to cure the ills through legislations in preference to bullets. There it ends.

Moorhouse is perhaps more precise when he observes in his Preface :

"In a sense, the story of Calcutta is the story of India and the story of the so-called third world in miniature. It is the story of how and why Empire was created and what happened when Empire finished. It is the story of people turning violently to Communism for salvation. It is also the story of Industrial Revolution. The imperial residues of Calcutta, a generation after Empire ended, is both a monstrous and a marvellous city".

Opinion is likely to differ on Moorhouse's premise that Calcutta is turning violently to Communism. This indeed is a matter of opinion or speculation. But there will perhaps be no dearth of people (and they are not necessarily political) who will be inclined to think that the tendency to prefer Communism to Congress ideology, or for that matter, any other ideology is to be explained more in terms of a negative attitude arising out of rejection of Congress ways and practices since Independence and less in terms of salvation theory. But for the present Calcutta remains a laboratory for political experiments to which the eyes of the rest of India turn with alternate feelings of hope and fear, but never without interest. In a sense, Calcutta is both a lesson and a warning to India, a challenge and a question mark. Can India survive Calcutta?

Calcutta Metropolitan Statistics

TABLE NO. 1

**World's Largest Agglomerations, Ranked by size of Populations
(in Millions)**

Names of Cities	Population	Names of Cities	Population
New York—NE			
New Jersey	20.4	Seoul	8.5
Tokyo		Gtr. Bombay	8.2
Yokohama	20.0	Chicago—NW	
Mexico City	15.0	Indiana	8.3
Sao Paulo	13.5	Moskva	7.8
Shanghai	13.4	Cairo-Giza-Imbaba	7.5
Los Angeles		Djakarta	7.3
Long Beach	11.7	Milano	6.6
Beijing (Peking)	10.7	Manjla	5.7
Rio de Janerio	10.7	Bogota	5.5
London	10.2	Teheran	5.4
Buenos Aires	10.1	Delhi	6.1
Paris	9.9	Madras	4.2
Osaka—Kobe	9.5	Istanbul	5.2
Rehin—Ruhr	9.3	Baghdad	5.1
*Calcutta	9.1	Karachi	5.0

* Largest (1980) urban area in India.

Source : Population facts at hand UNFPA Publication 1979.

TABLE NO. 2
Population of Metropolitan Cities in India—1981

Sl. No.	State	City	Number of Population (in thousands)	Literate Population (in thousands)	Sex Ratio
1.	West Bengal	Calcutta (U.A.)	9,166	5,979	783
2.	Maharashtra	Greater Bombay	8,203	5,591	775
3.	Union Territory	Delhi (U.T.)	6,196	2,738	810
4.	Tamil Nadu	Madras (U.A.)	4,277	2,813	930
5.	Karnataka	Bangalore (U.A.)	2,914	1,834	893
6.	Andhra Pradesh	Hyderabad (U.A.)	2,566	1,491	910
7a	Gujarat	Ahmedabad City	2,124	1,352	869
7b	-do-	Ahmedabad (U.A.)	2,510	N.A.	N.A.
8.	Uttar Pradesh	Kanpur (U.A.)	1,685	0,940	804
9.	Maharashtra	Pune (U.A.)	1,685	1,135	880
10.	-do-	Nagpur (U.A.)	1,298	0,835	910
11	Uttar Pradesh	Lucknow (U.A.)	1,007	0,575	834
12.	Rajasthan	Jaipur (U.A.)	1,005	0,538	867

* Source : INFA YEAR-BOOK—1982.

** Abbreviations : U.A. = Urban Agglomeration. N.A. = Not available.

TABLE NO. 3

Population characteristics of West Bengal

Sl. No.	Item	1971	1981 (P)
1.	Population (million)		
	Male	23.4	28.5
	Female	20.9	26.0
	Total	44.3	54.5
	Rural	33.3	40.1
	Urban	11.0	14.4
2.	Sex ratio (female per 1,000 males)	891	911
3.	Age Structure (Percentages of total population)—		
	0-14 (years)	43	—
	15-59 (years)	52	—
	60 + (years)	5	—
4.	Proportion of urban population	25	26
5.	Density (per sq. km.)	504	614
6.	Percentage of lite- racy	33.20	40.88

P=Provisional.

Source : Economic Review 1981.

TABLE NO. 4
Percentage of Workers including non-workers with secondary work in 1971 and marginal workers in 1981 to total population

District	Population	% of literacy	1971				Percentage of total workers to population
			Workers	Non-workers with Secondary work	Total workers	Percentage of main workers to total population	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Calcutta	3,148,746	60.32	1,165,542	1,460	1,167,002	37.02	37.06
Population	% of literacy	Main workers	1981				Percentage of total workers to population
			Percentage of main workers to total population	Marginal workers	Total workers	Percentage of total workers to population	
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
3,291,655	68.99	1,149,684	34.93	10.747	1,160,431	35.25	

Source : Census, 1981.

TABLE NO. 5

Population by Religion (1971 Census)

Religion	West Bengal	Calcutta City
Hindus	34,611,864	2,517,589
Muslims	9,064,388	446,932
Christians	251,752	44,064
Sikhs	35,084	11,332
Buddhists	121,504	9,196
Jains	32,203	18,937
Others including religion not stated	195,266	705

TABLE NO. 5A

Population of Calcutta according to Mother-Tongue (1971 Census)

Name of Mother-Tongue	Males	Females
Assamese	203	99
Bengali	1,047,489	839,981
Gujrati	14,657	446,932
Hindi	512,636	205,965
Kannada	443	341
Kashmiri	5,121	52
Malayalam	5,121	2,946
Marathi	1,377	661
Oriya	37,501	4,745
Punjabi	15,406	10,168
Sanskrit	9	1
Sindhi	2,257	2,027
Tamil	7,355	5,831
Telegu	4,475	3,200
Urdu	237,393	111,296
	1,886,443	1,199,570

TABLE NO. 6

Some Facts and Figures on the Pavement Dwellers in Calcutta

According to the '71 census—48,802

A study on 10,000 Pavement Dwellers

Adults	56.00%	Children	43.14%
(Males)	32%	(Males)	23.02%
(Females)	24%	(Females)	20.12%
Hindus	73.06%	Bengali Speaking	68.96%
Muslims	25%	Hindi Speaking	24.99%

Reasons for coming

1. Economic	86.7%	Permanent Migrants	64.1%
2. Political	5.3%	Seasonal Migrants	24.1%
3. Social	3.3%	Regular Visitors for	
4. Others	4.7%	odd jobs/business	4.5%
		Casual visitors	7.3%

Migrants from West Bengal

24-Parganas	56.6%
Howrah	2.2%
Hooghly	0.7%
Midnapur	3.7%
Nadia	0.6%
Others	3%

From other States

Bihar	19.9%
Andhra Pradesh	1.7%
Bangladesh	6.5%
Uttar Pradesh	3%
Others	2%

Occupation

1. Casual day-labourers	21.2%	2. Maid Servants	6.1%
3. Beggars	20.5%	4. Rickshawalas	6.6%
5. Thelawalas	6.3%	6. Paper/Ragpickers	4.9%
7. Vegetable/Food seller	5.3%	8. Hawkers	1.6%
9. Regular day labourers	3.3%	10. Others	24.2%

All employment of the pavement dwellers are of a very casual nature, except for a small percentage of regular day-labourers.

Economic Groups of Pavement Dwellers Monthly Income Range—

		Percentage
(a) The very poor	Rs. 0 to Rs. 80	55.8%
(b) The middle class	Rs. 80 to Rs. 140	32%
(c) The well-off	Rs. 140 to Rs. 200 and above	12%

Source : Under the shadow of the Metropolis—they are citizens too ! A CMDA Publication, 1975.

TABLE NO. 7

Births and Deaths per Mille in Calcutta

Year	Total No.	Rate per 1,000 population per annum.	Total No. of deaths	Rate per 1,000 population per annum
1975-76	30,623	10.46	19,495	16.66
1976-77	33,451	17.38	18,054	5.73
1977-78	31,704	16.47	18,961	6.02

All ratios calculated on Census population.

Source : Calcutta Corporation Year Book (1980-81).

TABLE NO. 7A

Mortality in Calcutta 1975-76

Sl. No.	Causes	Deaths	Death rate
1.	Cholera	177	0.06
2.	Small Pox	2	—
3.	Malaria	—	—
4.	Enteric	26	0.01
5.	Measles	289	0.10
6.	Kala-azar	—	—
7.	Influenza	34	—
8.	C. S. Meningitis	153	0.05
9.	Other Fever	265	0.09
10.	Dysentery and Diarrhoea	1,009	1.34
11.	Respiratory Diseases	4,177	0.43
12.	Tuberculosis (Lungs)	893	0.30
13.	Do (Other forms)	405	0.14
14.	Plague	—	—
15.	Diphtheria	115	0.05
16.	Other causes	11,977	4.09
	TOTAL	19,495	5.96

Death rate : Per 1,000 population.

Source : Calcutta Corporation Year-Book : (1980-81).

TABLE NO. 8

**Registration of Motor-Vehicles of Calcutta district as stood on
31.12.82**

Category of Motor-Vehicles	Total Numbers
1. Lorry	21,206
2. Van + Tempo	6,313
3. Cab + Jeep	90,727
4. Motor-cycle and Scooter	57,690
5. Taxi	7,538
6. State Carriage	3,256
7. Contract carriage (including luxury taxi, luxury bus and ambulance)	2,191
8. Mini-bus	643
9. Trailer + Tractor	2,934
TOTAL	1,92,498

* Slow Moving Vehicles in 1978.

1. Hand Cart	15,000
2. Rickshaw	6,000

Source : Public Vehicles Deptt., Govt. of West Bengal.

TABLE NO. 9

Activities of the Calcutta State Transport Corporation

Particulars	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82
1. Number of routes	101	107	119
(a) City	63	65	69
(b) Long distance	38	42	58
2. Total Route length (in km.)	7,937	8,245	9,557
(a) City	1,012	1,064	1,090
(b) Long distance	6,925	7,181	9,047
3. Number of vehicles as on 31st March '83	1,059	1,099	1,653
4. Average number of vehicles put on road per day	721	738	723
(a) City	621	632	597
(b) Long distance	100	106	126
5. Number of persons employed as on 31st March (excluding Central Workshop)	13,010	13,078	13,311
6. Total kilometers run (gross) in '000	45,291	44,858	44,702
(a) City	35,806	34,893	33,033
(b) Long distance	9,485	9,965	11,669
7. Total passengers served (in '000)	363,600	298,900	309,100
(a) City	358,200	293,200	302,300
(b) Long distance	5,400	5,700	6,800
8. Total earnings (excluding Central Workshop) (Rs. in lakhs)	15,400	—	—
9. Net profit (+)/Loss (—) Rs. in (—)	157,600	—	—

Source : Calcutta State Transport Corporation.

TABLE NO. 10

Activities of the Calcutta Tramways Company Limited

Particulars	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82
1. Number of vehicles—			
(i) Tram cars	438	438	438
(ii) Miscellaneous cars	10	10	10
2. Total number of routes	26	29	27
3. Total route length (in km.) (Double Track)	62	62	62
4. Average number of vehicles put on road per day	320	290	280
5. Total length route ('000 km.)	13,818	13,315	12,265
6. Total passengers served (in lakhs)	2,731	2,650	2,570
7. Average number of persons employed per day	8,939	8,977	9,110
8. Total earnings (Rs. in lakhs)	510	564	642
9. Net profit (+)/Loss (—) Rs. in	-468.19	-879.65	-889.45

Source : Economic Review 1982-83.

TABLE NO. 11

METRO RAILWAY AT A GLANCE

1. Projected length, terminus to terminus	16.43 kilometres
2. Stations : Over ground	2
Under ground.	15
Total	17
3. Average inter-station distance	1.02 kilometres
4. Coaches per train	8
5. Classes	One
6. Each coach measure in length and in width	19.50 metres and 2.75 metres
7. Highest speed	80 kilometres per hour
8. Average	30 kilometres per hour
9. Electricity for trains at peak demand for the system	750 volts D.C. 53 Megawatts (65 MVA)
10. Supplied through	a third rail
11. Travel time : Dum Dum to Tollygunge	33 minutes
Tollygunge to Esplanade	15 minutes
Esplanade to Dum Dum	18 minutes
12. Each coach will carry	54 sitting 218 standing
13. Each train will carry passengers	2500 Approx.
14. Interval between trains	2½ minutes (later 1½ minutes)

Source : Metro Railway.

TABLE NO. 11A

STATIONS AND INTER-STATION DISTANCES

Sl. No.	Name of the Station	Distance
1.	Dum Dum—Belgachia	2.151 K.M.
2.	Belgachia—Shyambazar	1.625 K.M.
3.	Shyambazar—Sovabazar	0.928 K.M.
4.	Sovabazar—Girish Park	1.000 K.M.
5.	Girish Park—M. G. Road	0.852 K.M.
6.	M. G. Road—Central	0.951 K.M.
7.	Central—Chandni Chowk	0.597 K.M.
8.	Chandni Chowk—Esplanade	0.705 K.M.
9.	Esplanade—Park St.	0.808 K.M.
10.	Park St.—Maidan	0.727 K.M.
11.	Maidan—Rabindra Sadan	1.016 K.M.
12.	Rabindra Sadan—Bhawani- pur	0.848 K.M.
13.	Bhawanipur—Jatindas Park	1.033 K.M.
14.	Jatindas Park—Kalighat	0.621 K.M.
15.	Kalighat—Rabindra Sarobar	1.243 K.M.
16.	Rabindra Sarobar — Tolly- gunge	1.344 K.M.

Source : Metro Railway.

TABLE NO. 12

Passengers volume within the Calcutta Metropolitan District and its Metro Core (in lakh)
Average week day in the year 1978-79

Total in CMD Subur ban Train Services	Public Buses A	Private Buses B	Total in CMD A+B	Within the Metro Core		Total in		Within the Total in		Within CMD Ferry Metro Core Ferry Services
				A+B	City	CMD Mini Buses	Calcutta City	CMD Mini Metro Core Mini Buses	CMD Ferry Services	
17.13	9.36	57.40	66.76	61.76	9	1.65	1.59	.9		.4

Mass Transportation system in CMD carried about 9.5 million of Transit Passengers in an average week day in 1978-89.

Source : Report on perspective plan and action programme for the CMD—1981

TABLE NO. 12A

Estimated Sectoral Modal Split of Total Transit Passenger Movement in CMD Area.

(All figures in Lakhs)					Average		Weekday			
Year	Public Sector		Private Sector		Ferry	Private Bus	Total	Percentage of total	Total Passenger volume	
	C.S.T.C. Bus	Tram	Metro Rail	Total						Percentage of total
1979-80	14.88	9.30	Nil	24.18	29.28	1.65	0.90	58.39	70.72	82.57
1982-83	19.60	12.30	Nil	22.70	23.98	2.25	1.20	62.76	76.02	94.66
1985-86	21.00	12.30	11.00	44.30	41.31	2.40	1.30	59.24	58.69	107.24
1989-90	30.00	12.30	15.00	57.30	47.46	2.60	2.00	58.84	52.54	120.74

Source: Directorate of Planning CMDA, Report 'Paper on Public Policy and Strategy for Development of Public Transport System in the Calcutta Metropolitan District'—1979.

TABLE NO. 12B
Expected Transit Passenger Trips within the CMD (Lakhs)
Average Weekday

Year	Surface Transit Passenger		Suburban Railway Passenger Trips		Total CMD
	Within Metro core	Outside core	Within Metro core	Outside Metro core	
1985-86	86.09	21.15	7.60	15.40	23.00
1989-90	95.02	25.72	7.73	18.03	25.76
1995-96	104.19	30.81	8.70	20.28	28.98
2000-01	109.39	36.61	9.56	22.32	31.88

Source : CMDA Report No. 128.

TABLE NO. 13

Cargo Handled by Calcutta Port
(Exports plus Imports)
(in million tons)

Year	Calcutta	Total of Indian Ports	Percentage share of Calcutta Port in all India total
1977-78	7.5	67.5	11.1
1978-79	8.0	71.1	11.2
1979-80	8.6	80.1	10.7
1980-81	9.3	81.1	11.5
1981-82	9.7	88.9	10.9

TABLE NO. 13A

Volume of Cargo Handled at Calcutta Port (excluding Haldia)
during the last 5 years

Year	Volume in 1,000 tonnes
1977-78	4,350
1978-79	4,391
1979-80	3,843
1980-81	4,066
1981-82	4,448

TABLE NO. 13B

Cargo Handled at Calcutta Port
(in thousand tonnes)

Items	1977-78	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82
Export Cargo	3,584	2,713	2,554	2,302	2,980
Import Cargo	3,965	5,266	6,001	6,988	6,770
Total Seaborne traffic	7,549	7,979	8,555	9,290	9,750
Inland Vessels Cargo	257	259	240	222	176
Total Traffic	7,806	8,238	8,795	9,512	9,926

Source : Calcutta Port Trust.

TABLE NO. 14

Traffic Movement at Calcutta Airport

Particulars	1979	1980	1981	1982 (January to June)
1. Total Inter- national Traffic				
(i) Number of passengers	154,035	239,365	253,973	126,809
(ii) Freight (in tonnes)	7,229	4,626	6,904	3,804
(iii) Mail (in tonnes)	151	212	164	400
2. Total Domestic Traffic				
(i) Number of passengers	1,108,329	1,067,526	1,121,728	594,273
(ii) Freight (in tonnes)	10,614	11,478	13,942	6,984
(iii) Mail (in tonnes)	4,033	4,225	4,126	1,998
3. Total Commercial Traffic				
(i) Number of passengers	1,339,881	1,306,891	1,375,701	721,082
(ii) Freight (in tonnes)	18,061	16,104	20,846	10,788
(iii) Mail (in tonnes)	4,284	4,437	4,290	2,398

Source : Director-General of Civil Aviation, Government of India

TABLE NO. 15

Study of Emission Inventory for Calcutta & Howrah
(April 1977—March 1978)

Source	Calcutta					Total	Howrah					Total
	SPM	SO ₂	CO	NO ₂	HC		SPM	SO ₂	CO	NO ₂	HC	
Industrial	208	29	68	11	43	359	117	15	96	2	9	239
Domestic	40	6	33	4	19	102	21	5	17	3	2	48
Transportation	8	26	176	13	18	241	8	26	55	18	10	117
Thermal Power Plant	155	15	3	19	1	193	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	411	76	280	47	81	895	146	46	168	23	21	404

Metric tonnes per day

TOTAL EMISSION

Particulars	MTPD	%
1. Suspended particulate matter (S.P.M.)	557	43%
2. Sulphur dioxide (SO ₂)	122	9
3. Carbon monoxide (CO)	448	35
4. Hydrocarbons (H.C.)	102	8
5. Oxides of nitrogen (N.O)	70	5
Total	1,299	

Source : Air Pollution Survey Calcutta & Howrah by NEERI—
Sponsored by CMDA.

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THEIR GO DOWNY WAY





